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**A COMPARISON OF PRINT AND VIDEO AS EDUCATIONAL MEDIA  
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORICAL THINKING**

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by

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**A COMPARISON OF PRINT AND VIDEO AS EDUCATIONAL MEDIA  
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This was an exploratory study designed to investigate the question of whether the medium chosen for the delivery of literature-based instruction impacts the processes through which students construct meaning and develop historical understanding. To that end the author observed two groups of seventh-grade students in a pull-out language arts program for gifted students. One group read the historical novel *The Education of Little Tree*; the other group watched the film version of the book. Both groups answered pre- and post-study questions, kept personal journals in which entries were made after each chapter or scene, and participated in class discussions following the reading or viewing, as well as individual interviews.

Based upon previous research and drawing upon the recent literature on historical thinking as well as that of reader response theory, the focus of the study was an attempt to discern differences between the groups in the nature of their responses to the story. Indeed some differences did emerge, although both sets of reactions appeared to be

enduring, which challenges previous assumptions that the responses of viewers tended to be more emotional but more short-lived than those of readers. Further, the readers actually displayed a greater number of emotional responses in their journals than did the viewers, suggesting perhaps a more cognizant, empathic than affective emotional response. Finally, the readers manifested more and deeper historical understandings in their responses than did their counterparts in the movie group.

Explanations for these differences were explored utilizing the available comparative literature and focusing on the established proposition that the most primary media require the highest level of abstraction on the part of the recipient and thus the most significant cognitive investment by the learner. This higher investment may result in a greater degree of internalization of the content and thus in the construction of deeper, richer understandings. While further research is required to pursue this proposition, these findings do have significant implications for research on the nature of historical thinking and, particularly, for practice, specifically the routine strategy of substituting films for historical fiction in social studies classrooms.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### **The nature of historical thinking**

The pedagogical objective that distinguishes social studies teachers from other content area instructors is that of fostering within their students a capacity for historical thinking. According to Frederick Drake and Sarah Drake Brown (2003), “All history educators, we believe, should be dedicated to eliciting historical thinking” (p. 466) or what Yeager and Wilson (1997) call “‘habits of mind’ and disciplined-based perspectives toward history” (p. 121). The practice of historical thinking is dependent upon the skills of thoughtful critical analysis and empathic reflection. It rests upon the understanding of history as a dynamic, evolving field of study. According to Wineburg (2001), “history teaches us a way to make choices, to balance opinions, to tell stories, and to become uneasy-when necessary-about the stories we tell” (p. ix). Holt (1990) concurs:

To do history is not to memorize, but to question and imagine. It is to go beyond facts to the making of a narrative, with all the selection, empathy, and risk of a point of view that this implies. Historical thinking...requires curiosity and a search for the paths of access, not just “getting things by heart”...Reading historically also means imagining what was not said, why, and how it might have been otherwise (p. xi).

Thus, thinking historically involves active involvement on the part of the student. It is not enough to possess information; one must seek knowledge—and not only seek, but be able to utilize and apply it. Davis (2001) distinguishes types of historical thinking as knowing *that* (which encompasses content), knowing *how* (indicating requisite skills),

and knowing *to* (implying motivation to act upon knowledge). Blackey (1999) extends this notion of historical understanding as a stimulus for action and offers this eloquently comprehensive characterization:

Thinking historically involves developing the ability to articulate problems in need of resolution and to formulate theses based upon what we have discovered; it is learning how to ask the kinds of questions for which answers, once determined, will help solve a historical problem or fill a gap in our knowledge. Thinking historically is derived from the knowledge we come to possess that enables us to look for answers, even when we don't necessarily know what we're looking for, much less what we will find. It involves the ability to evaluate sources, to analyze various kinds of data, and to synthesize ideas and both primary and secondary sources. Thinking historically is being able to discern themes and trends, to see patterns, similarities, and differences. It is the core of what historians do...and it certainly should be the one consistent ingredient that is blended into everything we teach. *To think historically is antithetical to thinking superficially* (p. xii, xiv).

Spoehr and Spoehr (1994) argue that “thinking historically...does not call for accumulation, but discrimination and informed judgment” (p. 71); it “requires flexibility and comprehensiveness” (p. 72) as well as the ability to deal with “the messiness of reality” and “to wrestle effectively with...questions to which there is no single ‘right answer,’ but to which there can be wrong or nonsensical ones” (p. 73). Allison Blakely (1999) adds: “Thinking historically leaves students with “a better grasp of the way the world works, and where they fit in...History’s specific contribution toward that end is in discerning basic patterns that have been evident in the evolution of human societies and in revealing the dynamics at work among the forces prompting both continuity and change” (p. 2).

David Trask, emphasizing the dynamic nature of the process, reminds us that students need “to see history as simultaneously process and product” (p. 27). Yeager and



Wilson (1997) emphasize the “interpretive nature of history” (p. 121), focusing on students’ understanding of “how history is made by historians and actual participants and how evidence is analyzed in the process of historical inquiry” (p. 122), while adding “historical time and perspective, layers and textures of meaning and context, the range and robustness of historical narrative, and rhetorical and persuasive devices” (p. 126) as key pedagogical and epistemological issues defining historical thought.

Historical thinking inherently entails the development of empathy, engaging the very capacities that make us human. Sam Wineburg (2001) says of mature historical cognition: “It is an act that engages the heart” (p. 22), and Eric Rothchild (1999) maintains that “thinking historically means developing historical empathy” (p. 21).

Davis (2001) concurs:

Empathy almost never is discounted as a necessary ingredient of proper historical inquiry...Empathy characterizes historical thinking that yields understanding within context. For the most part, it is intellectual in nature, but certainly it may include emotional dimensions. It arises or develops from the active engagement in thinking about particular people, events, and situations in their context, and from wonderment about reasonable and possible meanings within, in a time that no one can really know...Frequently, empathy springs from considerations of more than one, even several different, points of view or perspectives (pp. 3,5).

Barton and Levstik (2004) extend this consideration of perspective, proposing that preparation for involvement in “participatory democracy” is the ultimate justification of the study of history. In a pluralistic society such as ours, where “individuals and groups will hold radically different, even contradictory values” (p. 32), a basic prerequisite for authentic and productive participation is empathy, the ability to “imagine the thoughts and feelings of others from their own perspective” (p. 206). VanSledright (2001) agrees:

“One could say that historical empathy is essential to the health of pluralistic democracies” (p. 57).

Such empathy requires “contextualizing” the actions of the people of the past, that is, “We must understand as best we can, their world and how they saw it” (Barton and Levstik, p. 208). Therefore, to think historically is to bear witness to the essence of history as story. Robert Gutierrez (1999) believes that “teachers should strive to have students develop their own stories of history, stories they can construct based on the questions they believe are pertinent to their lives,” and that this is not a call to be oblivious to the facts of history, but to make them relevant to “creative inquiry” (p. 8).

### **The role of narrative**

How, then, are we to get our students to “think historically?” How do we break what Rothschild calls the “intellectual chains” which render students “passive plagiarists [because they] simply don’t trust themselves to think historically” (p. 21)? How do we get students, as Blackey advocates, “to be more than brainless sponges soaking up information,” and instead to be “forever curious...in order to seek truth and understanding” (p. xiv)? And how is it that a major complaint of social studies teachers and students, according to Quintero (in Duckworth, 2001), is that “social studies is irrelevant to students’ understanding of their social problems” (p. 93)? How can this be, given the vast, dynamic potential of social studies to spark curiosity, engage reflection, and challenge basic assumptions?

The failure of current practice in this regard has been well documented. Barton and Levstik (2004) assert bluntly: “No one likes the way history is taught” (p.1).

Echoing contemporary research, Almasi (1995) laments:

Throughout their academic lives, children are exposed to classroom cultures that foster understanding of literal aspects of text. Such indoctrination so influences them that they have difficulty critically examining text from more than one perspective, constructing thoughtful responses to what they have read, and defending their own interpretations (p. 314).

Yet, according to many researchers, the teaching of social studies, despite volumes of contra-indicative evidence, remains tediously unchanged: dominated by texts and worksheets, “content” is interpreted as “facts.” Wineburg poses an intriguing question in this regard: What sources beyond teachers and textbooks contribute to [students’] understanding [of the past]?

One possible area of exploration we may consider in our attempt to answer these questions lies in the nature of history itself: history as story. Bruner (1986) distinguished two modes of thought, two “distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality:” narrative (story) and paradigmatic (logical/scientific), and Drake and Brown (2003) remind us: “Jerome Bruner informs us of the power of the narrative to help students construct the past” (p. 473). Gutierrez suggests that to think historically is “to gain an understanding of the past through the construction and communication of the human story, an understanding that only the holistic nature of the stories can provide” (p. 7). Holt (1990) concurs:

In the process of doing history, one can be changed, transformed by what one learns. Stories have power, the power to change things. Thus history is not dead but alive, alive in the sense that our collective memory is what provides the starting points for understanding our

contemporary world. Alive also in the sense that through these narratives we make accessible certain ideas about human possibilities and foreclose others...We create stories that guide and resonate with how we think about our present (pp. 9, 10).

McGinley and Kamberelis (1996) suggest that narratives “allow us to interpret our pasts, envision our futures, and understand the lives of others with whom we interact” (p. 76), which Barton and Levstik (2004) maintain is a crucial element of the process of perspective taking.

Therefore, one could argue that it makes sense to present history in its “natural” form: as story. Carol Pixten (1999) suggests, “We should give students the latitude to develop their own historical imaginations. Literature can be an effective tool toward this end, and there are many wonderful novels and poems that have a rightful place in history courses” (p. 19). Many researchers have agreed with this perspective. Following an analysis of articles published in *Social Studies and the Young Learner* from 1988-2000, Field (2001) reports:

The efficacy of literature as a teaching tool in elementary social studies classes was highlighted in several journal articles. Children’s literature was offered as an important resource in articles about teaching elementary history. Seen as a helpful tool in helping students gain historical perspective, literature was promoted as an inspiration for students’ writing and analysis of a historical period (pp. 127-8).

Likewise McGinley and Kamberelis inform us: “Bruner explained that the imaginative use of the narrative form in literature engages readers in the exploration of human possibilities by situating them simultaneously in a “dual landscape” of both action and consciousness” (p. 76). And such a pursuit of human possibilities, after all, lies at the heart of social studies education—indeed all education, as Arthur Foshay (1991) reminds

us: “The one continuing purpose of education, since ancient times, has been to bring people to as full a realization as possible of what it is to be a human being (p. 277).

### **Substituting film for literature**

However, due to increasing pressures of time constraints, standardized testing, accountability, and various other factors, many teachers disregard the use of literature within their curricula; many others substitute film versions of historical works as a sort of compromise. I myself often pursued this course of action as a high school history teacher. There are those who hold that the use of historical film is an alternate, and legitimate, means of developing historical imagination. Rosenstone (2004) believes: “Like written histories, films are not mirrors but constructions [which] add movement, color, sound, and drama to the past” (p. 29), and that along with film’s “powerful experiential quality...the contribution of the historical film lies precisely at the level of argument and metaphor, particularly as these engage the larger discourses of history” (p. 30).

Thus the question arises whether film and literature are equally effective means for presenting students with opportunities instrumental for development of historical thinking in the classroom. Barton and Levstik (2004) propose that “what we need are studies that directly compare children’s understanding of historical information presented in differing formats” (p. 141). Accordingly, the objective of this study is to determine what, if any, are the implications of substituting film for literature in terms of fostering the development of historical thinking among students? Is there a significant difference

in quantity and/or quality of historical thinking depending upon the medium employed in introducing students to fundamental historical concepts? And if differences do exist, what theoretical principles may be instrumental in explaining them? These theoretical issues will be examined in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

#### **The role of literature in social studies**

The notion of using literature in the social studies classroom is certainly not new. The use of fiction within the social studies classroom has been a common recommendation in contemporary professional literature for some time. Bilof (1996) observes that “recent articles in professional journals have touted the use of historical fiction to address social studies concepts at the middle and elementary school levels” (p. 19), an observation which is borne out by a brief review of contributions to *The Social Studies* within the last ten years. Danks (1996) states: “literature can provide an avenue for understanding the historical concepts and events of any time period” (p. 105). Perez-Stable (1996) asserts that children’s literature provides “a superb opportunity to supplement basal textbooks in social studies (p. 24), and Riecken and Miller (1990) maintain that “through discussion, the study of literature, and reflection on their own experience, children can begin to increase their understanding of the complexities of the social world in which we live” (p. 63). Ginocchio (1987) adds that “poetry can be an effective and enriching medium through which to study any historical event or culture” (p. 123), and, concentrating specifically on the study of war, Storey (1985) notes that “literature is an excellent source for locating and identifying a number of values from a variety of cultures and reactions to all forms of hostilities” (p. 85).

Furthermore, many authors claim that this concept is already well known among educators. McGowan and Guzzetti (1991) report that “increasingly, social studies educators acknowledge that literary works have instructional utility in their field. Recent curricular guidelines...specify a strong relationship between literature and social studies teaching” (p. 16). Kaltsounis (1990) concurs: “The literature indicates rather clearly that educators are already convinced that literature and the arts do contribute in enhancing social studies learnings” (p. 284). Fuhler (1991) adds: “The wisdom of coupling textbooks and trade books in the social studies classroom is firmly supported by research” (p. 234).

Teachers have thus been exhorted for quite some time to implement an approach to social studies teaching which entails a substantial literary component. McGowan and Guzzetti (1991) specifically urge teachers to employ a literature-based approach: “For several reasons, teachers should use exemplary trade books to promote social studies learnings...We insist strongly that this approach has instructional utility and promotes conceptual understanding” (pp. 18, 20). Likewise, Ginocchio asserts that “social studies teachers who wish to enhance citizenship through integrative thinking need to bridge the gap between the social studies and the humanities” (p. 123).

Nor has support for this approach waned in recent years. Schwebel (2003) notes that despite “changing trends in academia” in recent years, “educators have extolled the use of...works of historical fiction as a means to integrate the disciplines and elicit student interest in a subject often considered a dull stream of names, dates, and facts” (p. 195-6). She elaborates with a case in point:



In a resource guide for secondary school social studies teachers, for example, educator Elizabeth H. Howard recommends that teachers first introduce students to historical periods, personalities, and problems through fiction, then through traditional historical narrative. In the face of widespread student apathy and ignorance about American history, she writes, “Students need to see that history is alive. This will happen when they are able to think of history first of all as a story” (1998, p. xi). Both Howard’s identification of the problem and recommended solution reverberate throughout the education literature, and her logic fits within a larger interdisciplinary scholarship that agrees that humans, and particularly modern humans, construct meaning through narrative (p. 196).

Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, and Pierce (2000) assert that “historical fiction...has the potential to affect readers’ lives—and therefore affect the history we are creating today” (p. 547).

Citing Huck (1998), they summarize: “In short, historical fiction has the power to transport us outside of our current time and place, and then to return us to ourselves as changed individuals; to make us more human” (p. 548). A cursory review of the literature reveals countless proponents promoting the use of literature in the presentation of specific topics, from the Civil War (Stone, 2004), Mexico (Field, 2003), and immigrants (Lamme, Fu, and Lowry, 2004), to civil rights (Wilson & Wetzel, 2005), character education (Edgington, 2002) and national values (Perez-Stable, 2005), just to name a few.

What is the theoretical underpinning for promoting the use of literature within social studies curricula? To answer this we must briefly review the evolution of currently acknowledged theory concerning the nature of the reading process.

### **The reading process: From bibliotherapy to transactional theory**

An understanding of the possible impact of the printed word upon the development of human consciousness is as old as writing itself: libraries in ancient

Greece often bore the inscription, “Medicine for the Soul” (Morris-Vann, 1979). The practice of bibliotherapy, the notion that books can be a source of health and healing for the human spirit, dates from the Middle Ages; it gained impetus and some measure of “scientific” status during the 1930’s and 40’s through the pioneering studies of Doctors Karl and William Menninger, who utilized printed materials as a means for helping patients understand and cope with their illnesses. The transition of bibliotherapy from a process using didactic materials and targeting cognitive processes to one in which fictional resources are employed to address areas of affective concern is reflected in Carolyn Rhodes’ ground-breaking research. Her 1949 doctoral dissertation explored the bibliotherapeutic process from a psychoanalytical perspective, and paralleled contemporary “interactive reading” theories. (For a more extensive discussion of bibliotherapy, the reader is directed to “Bibliotherapy in the Schools: A brief history” [Scott, 1997].

Also during the post World War II, period, Louise Rosenblatt published her seminal work developing her “transactional theory” of reading: *Literature as Exploration* (1938). In fact, Purves and Beach (1972, cited in Rosenblatt, 1994) state: “Rosenblatt... provided the theoretical frameworks or hypotheses for a number of studies of response, bibliotherapy, and teaching methods” (p. xii). The relationship of response theory to historical thinking is noted by Wineburg (2001):

How do skilled readers of history enter into the text to “participate actively in the fabrication of meaning?” How do they “write” texts while reading them? One way to do so is by simulating an interspsychic process intraphysically. In plain English, they pretend to deliberate with others by talking to themselves. Keen observers of the reading process have long noted this phenomenon. For example, in a prescient essay that anticipated later trends in reader-response

theory, Walker Gibson claimed that we read texts by simulating two readers. an “actual reader” and a “mock reader.” The actual reader is an overall monitor of the meanings constructed during the reading. But the mock reader is the reader who allows himself or herself to be taken in by rhetorical devices, to feel their effect, and to experience the associations triggered by crafted prose (p. 70).

Rosenblatt’s theory helps explain the capacity for books to become “internalized” by the reader. Predicated upon the interactive dynamics of the reading process, the transactional theory emphasizes the fact that an encounter with a literary work is a deeply personal experience. “The experience of literature, far from being for the reader a passive process of absorption, is a form of intense personal activity...The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition” (Rosenblatt, 1938, pp. vi, 37.) According to this theory, what the reader brings to the text determines the meaning of that text for that reader as much as the words written on the page. “Hence, the essential consideration at this stage of our inquiry is that anything we call a literary experience gains its significance and force from the way in which the stimuli present in the literary work interact with the mind and emotions of a particular reader” (p. 35).

Rosenblatt echoes the major themes of bibliotherapy, explaining that the “tendency toward identification will certainly be diverted in one direction or another by the nature of our temperament and our own needs and preoccupations at the time we read” (p. 46), and discussing the value of literature for “its objective presentation of our own problems and conflicts...[which] enables us to see them with a certain detachment, and to arrive at a more objective understanding of our own situation and of our own motivation” (p. 50). The transactional theory reflects the principles of bibliotherapy in

the attention paid to the affective domain; Rosenblatt notes that her “students emphasized literature as a means of enlarging their knowledge of the world because through literature they acquire not so much additional *information* as *experience*. New understanding is conveyed to them in a living, vivid, dynamic way” (p. 47). She incorporates this notion into her delineation of two “stances” of the reader, which denote the cognitive and emotive aspects of reading. “Efferent” (from the Latin “effere: to carry away”) reading focuses on “what will remain as the residue *after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 23). She contrasts this with the “aesthetic” stance, in which “the reader’s primary concern is with what happens *during* the actual reading event” (p. 24), and insists that it is this type of reading which is indispensable to a true literary experience. Only in the aesthetic stance does the reader “live through” the experience; and “what is lived through is felt constantly to be linked with the stimulus of the words” (p. 29). She notes a blurring of the distinction between the fictional and the real, and questions whether the distinction is in “reality” as sharp as it appears: “Philosophers, psychologists, and anthropologists have led us to question how much of what we take to be ‘reality’ has been structured by the human organism and the assumptions of our culture. Our vision of the ‘real’ world often depends on what we bring to it not only from past ‘reality’ but also from the world of fiction or the imagination” (p. 33). (Here she anticipates the continuing growth in acceptance of the constructivist paradigm.)

Finally, the transactional theory, like bibliotherapy, acknowledges the social nature of the reading process. Most contemporary proponents of bibliotherapy insist that

the social context-the sharing and/or discussion of the reading-is essential to the process (Adler and Clark, 1991, Hynes, 1986, Pardeck, 1991). Likewise, Rosenblatt continually refers to the paradox that reading is at once an intensely personal and largely social activity. Reminiscent of Vygotsky, she summarizes:

But part of the magic-and indeed the essence-of language is the fact that it must be internalized by each individual human being, with all the special overtones that each unique person and unique situation entail. Hence language is at once basically social and intensely individual. In other words, the transactional view of human life applies here with all its force, and the transactional view of the reading act is simply an exemplification, with highly rarified complications, of the basic transactional character of all human activity, and especially linguistic activity (1978, p. 20).

### **Relevance of reading theory to social studies practice**

Thus the implications of the principles of bibliotherapy and the transactional theory for school curricula appear obvious, illuminating the potential of rich literature to profoundly impact the learning experiences of students. Accordingly, as previously noted, the notion of incorporating novels into content areas has had many proponents. Alice Keliher, chairperson of the Commission on Human Relations of the Progressive Education Association, which sponsored the publication of Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*, speaks to the relevance of "the author's clarification of the relation between literary appreciation and social understanding," and asserts (in 1938!): "Today, teachers in the social studies...are turning to literature for materials that reveal the problems of human life" (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. xi). Indeed, Rosenblatt (1994) herself relates: "My classroom experiences made me realize that essential to the assimilation of...social insights was a personally experienced evocation of the literary work" (p. 180). In her

preface to the third edition of *Literature as Exploration* (1976), she might be mistaken for a social studies teacher describing course objectives: “Literature can be an important medium...for enhancing a pride in ethnic roots while at the same time fostering a sense of community with other Americans of different ethnic heritages—an orchestration of diversities in our pluralistic society” (p. xi).

Further, Fuhler (1991) emphasizes the subjective response of the reader, describing it as “a personal reaction to the words on a page, based upon unique life experiences” (p. 235). Citing Rosenblatt, she elaborates on the transactional process and concludes:

Therefore, it appears that reading and understanding subject matter in social studies is a multidimensional process that can be facilitated by the familiar narrative format of a trade book. It is obvious, too, that personal response is crucial if meaningful connections with history are to occur...Knowing about the past...is not quite the same as understanding and feeling about it (p. 235).

Likewise, Eeds and Wells (1991) refer to transactional theory in promoting the use of literature within the social studies classroom, and Freeman and Levstik (1988) propose that literature “can lead children to a more personal encounter with history. It can generate a response to history that is the scaffolding for mature historical understanding” (p. 336). While the literature is replete with accounts asserting the benefits of literature in the social studies curriculum, probably none is more powerfully expressed than that of Common (1986):

Clearly, social studies is that part of the school curriculum that provides the opportunity for students to determine how they want to live their lives and what their reasons are for living that way...It is in the moral realm that the encounter between the subject matter of the social studies and the students becomes significant and complex. Teachers who fail to recognize that the

inescapable formation of moral understandings by students is a necessary and proper part of the study of social studies are ignorant of what social studies most fundamentally is. It is in the moral realm that social studies becomes the powerful, exciting, enduring, and indispensable subject for critical study. It is here that the story as instructional vehicle most properly belongs. Through the literary experience our values are fostered (p. 247).

And so support for the use of literature in social studies classrooms is well documented in the professional literature. Moreover, many authors claim that this concept is already well known among educators (e.g., Fuhler, 1991; Kaltsounis, 1990). McGowan and Guzzetti (1991) report that “since 1929, over 160 sources have explicated the ways in which [literature] can enrich social studies teaching” (p. 16). Teachers have been exhorted to implement an approach to social studies teaching which entails a substantial literary component (McGowan & Guzzetti, 1991; Ginocchio, 1987).

### **Classroom realities**

However, classroom practice does not appear to reflect this theoretical consensus (Anderson, 1987). Despite the emphasis given to reading in the professional literature, engaged reading by students does not appear to have a key place in social studies curricula today. Surveys sponsored by the National Science Foundation and the Educational Products Information Institute in the early 1980’s indicated that “teachers rarely select printed social studies materials beyond a textbook” (McGowan & Guzzetti, pp. 16-17). Anderson surmised in 1987: “The trade book is a very valuable but frequently neglected social studies learning tool” (p. 88), and Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, and Pierce (2000) concur: “Historical fiction has been an overlooked genre in schools”

(p. 546). Further, a study conducted by this researcher in 1998 (Scott, Duda, & Soria, unpublished) revealed once again the familiar discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and practices, so aptly described bySizer (1984) in his classic portrayal of *Horace's Compromise*. Though all of the teachers interviewed asserted (quite strongly) that they believe that literature has a fundamental role within the social studies discipline, only slightly more than one-half incorporated *any* literary works into their lessons, and of those who did, none did so to the extent that (s)he "would like." In fact, the most extensive use that we found was the regular use of two novels over the course of the school year.

This same study revealed another trend. When asked to compare books to films as a means of conveying social studies information or concepts, the consensus was summarized in statements such as the following: "They probably get more out of a book—they've invested more time," and "Literature can't be beat. It's more in depth." Yet, three quarters of the teachers indicated that they used films to achieve learning objectives in their classrooms—far more than used literature, and on a more regular basis.

This discrepancy informs the central focus of this study: What, if any, are the pedagogical consequences of teachers' decisions to use film or literature to enhance the development of historical thinking in their students? Specifically, is there a difference in the amount, type, and/or quality of historical thought when instruction utilizes one or the other medium? And if so, what are the potential consequences regarding the prevalent practice in social studies classrooms of substituting film for literature for the development of historical thinking? Do the vicarious encounters differ qualitatively across the media?



Indeed, the role of literature in children's lives in general has been drastically reduced. Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen (1993) found that reading accounted for only 3% of a gifted student's waking hours, and Worthy (1996) reports that "research about reading attitudes and voluntary reading shows that, in general, both show a steady decline as students progress through school, and that negative attitudes become especially prevalent in the middle and high school years." A recent study by Scholastic Books (2006) found that time spent reading declines significantly after the age of eight: over 40% of 5-8 year olds were classified as "high frequency readers"; this dropped to 29% among 9-12 year olds.

### **Print vs. film**

What are the consequences of this reduced role of literature for students? In other words, are there learning and growth opportunities which children experience in their encounters with books that they do not experience in other learning environments? Do vicarious experiences with visual media differ significantly from encounters with written sources? Or, as Vandergrift (1996) asks: "How important are books and reading in a media-saturated environment?" (n.p.).

Reading, like all human interaction, involves a process through which an individual constructs meaning as a result of his/her encounter with others' meanings. As both Shrodes and Rosenblatt note, the meaning constructed is personal, in that it is dependent upon the individual's attitudes and beliefs, personality, prior experience—all the factors which have converged to make that individual who (s)he is at this particular

moment in time. But this meaning also has a social component, in that it is collaboratively constructed. The same is true for the act of viewing a film, especially if the film is watched in a social context (e.g., a classroom.) The question then becomes: Could the concepts of bibliotherapy and transactional theory apply to a viewer's interaction with a movie in a manner similar to a reader's interaction with a book, or, as Marrs (1995) asks, "Does the medium of the treatment moderate the effects of bibliotherapy?" (p. 845). Vandergrift (1996) likewise wonders, "Does the transformation from picture story book to film change the nature of that story?" (n.p.).

There are some bibliotherapists who believe that the practice need not be restricted to the printed word. According to Hynes (1986):

In fact, the bibliotherapist does not restrict *literature* to the written word. In our world, audiovisuals are an important expression of people's thoughts and feelings. Therefore, recordings, films, videotapes, and filmstrips have all been successfully used as material for bibliotherapy sessions. The added dimension of sound and/or visual images can increase the impact of language (p. 13).

Rubin (1978a) concurs: "each medium has its advantages and drawbacks" (p. 77). She elaborates, noting that aural and visual media "can be understood by nonreaders and can approach the personal level of face-to-face contact" (p. 77). Curious about these differences and their effect on the dynamics of personal interaction between reader/viewer and story, Rubin conducted the following study (which was the springboard for my interest in this area of study):

Because this author could find no research on the implications of these differences for bibliotherapy, she conducted an informal experiment with two groups each of eight incarcerated men who were already involved in a bibliotherapy program. One week, the first group read the short story version of Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"; the second group viewed a film version which is remarkably faithful to the original both in concept and in dialogue. The group which watched the film

reacted immediately and emotionally. Discussion of the film was so heated that word of it spread throughout the jail; the film had to be shown again for other men who had heard about it. The reading group, however, reacted slowly. Directly after reading the story, the men asked questions about specific details, debated the ending, and discussed the concept of a “scapegoat.” It was not until a few days later that emotional reactions were evident. A month later, the readers were still talking about the story, while the film group had lost interest. It seemed that the film caused an immediate and intense, but temporary, reaction, whereas the print version led to a delayed, longer-lasting impression. Of course, controlled research is necessary before any conclusions can be drawn (p. 77).

This difference in reaction between the two groups may, in part, be explained by the time factor. Perhaps the dynamics of bibliotherapy and transactional reading are partially a function of the amount of time an individual spends interacting with the story. Perhaps it is also partially explained by the insights offered by Lee Loevinger (cited by Rubin, 1978):

The technologically most advanced media are the most elementary and primitive. Psychologically, man has advanced from simple sensation to perception, and then to abstraction...Speech conveyed by telephone or radio is understood more easily and is a psychological regression from the abstraction of printed language to the more elemental level of oral language. Finally, television is a medium which...conveys the most information in the most literal form by giving us oral language combined with visual perceptions and requiring the least effort to interpret the abstractions. Thus television is a multi-channel communication which is more elemental and therefore has greater immediacy and impact than other media (p.77).

### **The Payne Foundation Studies**

On the other hand, the power of movies to influence social attitudes and affect behavior is likewise well known and well documented. The seminal studies examining the effects of movies on children’s’ development were conducted from 1929-1933 under a grant from the Payne Foundation, described by W.W. Charters, Chairman of the Committee on Educational Research of the Payne Fund, which directed the studies, as

“an organization interested in the radio, motion pictures and reading in relation to children and youth” (Forman, 1933, p. vii). The findings of these investigations, published over 70 years ago, proved quite surprising to this researcher and challenged the original hypothesis premising this project: namely, that reading produced a somehow “deeper” and more permanent reaction to a story than did viewing.

The most striking finding came from a study conducted by Peterson and Thurstone from the University of Chicago. The results achieved by these investigators indicate that, not only can motion pictures significantly influence the development of attitudes, but also that these changes are maintained over time. For example, in one study, students were surveyed for evidence of anti-Chinese prejudice, which was found to be substantial. After viewing the film *Sons of the Gods*, a film depicting the protagonist, Sam Lee, as an attractive representative of an admirable culture, “the shift in attitude was striking” (Forman, p. 124). According to the investigators, “The conclusion that the film *Sons of the Gods* made the children more favorable toward the Chinese is undoubtedly justified” (p. 124-25). What is more astonishing still is that five months later, this change of attitude persisted. After an interval of nineteen months the experimenters were again able to test the children, and found that the new attitude was still present.

Of course, this means that a change in attitude in the opposite direction is also possible, and, in fact, this premise was born out in another example from this study. From another sample, students were tested for their attitude toward blacks, and the results showed “a pronounced liberality toward the Negro race” (p. 125). The children were then shown *The Birth of a Nation*, widely considered to present a negative portrayal of

the black race. As in the first case, the shift of attitude was pronounced, this time in a negative direction, and subsequent testing at five and again at eight months later indicated that the change again persisted over time. Similar studies were conducted concerning other racial groups, such as Germans, as well as attitudes toward other social issues, notably gambling, capital punishment, and pacifism, with similar results. It was likewise discovered that showing multiple films on the same topic had a cumulative effect.

Forman concluded: "The motion picture, which can be a tremendous power for good, can as obviously be a powerful force for evil, depending upon its content and its use" (p.127).

With regard to the use of film for the transmission of knowledge, these studies also shed some light. In a study conducted by Holaday and Stoddard, the researchers found that watching movies significantly increased the store of information of the groups studied. After pretesting and then viewing selected films, second and third graders showed changes in correct answers from fifteen to twenty-seven percent, fifth and sixth graders from three to fifty-six percent, high school students from thirteen to sixty-seven percent, and adults revealed increases from forty-one to seventy-three percent. Again, this gain persisted over time; tested without warning a month later, virtually all of the knowledge had been retained, and in some cases, even "increased, due to a process of maturation recognized by the investigators" (Forman, p. 58). However, when shown erroneous information in movies, students not only increased their level of incorrect information; their level of correct information pertaining to the topics addressed in the film actually decreased! (That is, information which had been correctly relayed in the pretest was "relearned" as incorrect information as a result of watching the movie.) The

amount of loss of ranged from eight percent in the case of the second and third graders to thirty-four percent in the case of the high schoolers.

Thus it is apparent that children acquire and retain from films much essential material that is pivotal in their development. Holaday went so far as to say: “My private guess is that pictures play a considerably larger part in the child’s imagination than do books” (Forman, p. 60). Why might this be so? What could explain this phenomenon?

Part of the explanation may lie in the body’s physiological response to watching a movie, as opposed to reading a book. Dr. Christian Ruckmick and Dr. Wendell Dysinger, from the University of Iowa, set out to measure children’s emotional responses to movies, relative to adults, using an instrument called a psycho-galvanometer, which measures changes in electrical effects from the body in connection with emotion. The results indicated that the level of emotional response was inversely related to the age of the viewer; the youngest group of children registered readings three times the increased level of the adults. Forman concludes: “The seeing of a motion picture is for young children a powerful emotional experience that affects their young brains and nerves with almost the force of an electric shock” (Forman, p. 98).

This assessment is supported by research on the heart rates of movie spectators. Dr. Ruckmick also monitored the heartbeat of the subjects connected to the galvanometer while watching movies—movies which, again, were not chosen for particularly exciting or harrowing content, but were “ordinary specimens.” Nonetheless, the heart rate of viewers fluctuated in response to what was taking place on the screen, at times rising to

nearly double the normal rate of the individual. Ruckmick and Dysinger describe the danger of such a situation:

They (the children) are sitting quiet; there is no chance to express the emotion in activity: yet they are intensely stimulated. Such a situation is bad for health, represents a deplorable mental hygienic situation and might easily contribute to the habits which are popularly called “nervousness” in children. Where the boy or girl has a chance to work off emotions in the open, in exercise or play, it is splendid. Such excitement in a darkened theatre is by no means splendid (Forman, p. 103).

That these physiological effects lead to behavioral concerns was also documented through the Payne studies. Using an apparatus called a hypnograph, Renshaw, Miller, and Marquis of Ohio State University observed the sleep habits of one hundred and seventy children over a period of two and a half years. The researchers concluded that, while the actual influence of motion pictures upon sleep depends upon many factors and is somewhat individualized for each child, still it did appear that movie viewing did significantly and negatively impact sleep “motility” (restlessness), and that this effect persisted for as long as four or five nights after the movie had been seen. The investigators further note that definite changes in behavior are associated with even moderate degrees of fatigue, and warn:

The significant increases in fatigue, whether induced by sleep impairment following the movies, from overwork, from narcotic drugs or alcohol, or any source of oxygen deprivation, are detrimental to health and growth, not only because of their known physiological consequences, but also because of the fact that the important inhibitions which serve to prevent misconduct are weakened (Forman, p. 88).

Studies by May and Shuttleworth at Yale and by Blumer at the University of Chicago reiterate this theme of the effects of movies upon behavior. Drawing their

conclusions from a battery of questionnaires, teacher ratings, conduct records, and a “Guess Who” test in which students were invited to complete descriptive sentences with the name of a classmate, May and Shuttleworth reported:

We have found that the movie children average lower deportment records, do on the average poorer work in their school subjects, are rated lower by their teachers on two rating forms, are rated lower by their classmates on the Guess Who test, are less cooperative and less self-controlled as measured both by ratings and conduct tests, are slightly more deceptive in school situations, slightly less skillful in judging what is most the useful and helpful and sensible thing to do, and are somewhat less emotionally stable. Against this long record of disadvantages the movie children are superior on only two measures: they are mentioned oftener than others on the Guess Who test and are named more frequently as ‘best friends’ by their classmates (Forman, p. 132).

### **Implications of the Payne Studies**

Thus did the investigators involved in the Payne studies conclude that watching movies incurs very definite and significant physical effects upon developing children, and that, aside from the physical health and growth concerns, these effects have serious emotional and behavioral repercussions. As noted earlier, the discovery of these studies has muddied the waters for this researcher in terms of the relative impact of movies versus print as an educational medium, and has raised a supplementary set of questions with regard to the current project.

First of all, the date of these studies calls into question the significance of the findings for today’s society. However, Lawrence Baines (1993) argues that “few media educators would quarrel with the...major conclusions from the studies” (p. 547). Moreover, the fact that these studies were conducted during the infancy of film in this country, and therefore used subjects for whom the movies were a novel and



unprecedented activity, may render the findings somewhat irrelevant. On the other hand, it could be argued that, if these results were obtained back in the days when the content of motion pictures was mild compared to today's standards, and when the amount of time a child "interacted" with electronic media was substantially less, these findings may be even more pertinent today than before. This may be true especially in light of the explosion of video media to which children have access today, the increasing intensity levels and realism of these activities, and the amount of time, gauged as a percentage of their day, that children spend engaged in video-delivered activities. Added to these concerns is the tremendous increase in behavior issues facing schools today, such as the enormous increase in the diagnosis and treatment of Attention Deficit and related disorders, as well as the extreme cases of pathological behavior we have been witnessing in our schools in recent years. These questions obviously highlight the need for more current research in this area.

Another set of questions revolves around the nature of the responses observed during the course of these studies. Are these responses peculiar to the video medium? And, if so, why? I know of no research that has been conducted to measure the physiological effects of reading on children. Clearly, this would be a place to start in terms of answering the first question.

With regard to the second question, the results of most of the studies clearly indicated that the effects were much stronger for children than for adults, and that the effects decreased as the children got older (the notable exception being the study of knowledge retention/loss.) The investigators conclude that this was due in part to the fact

that the movies are, for all intents and purposes, “real” for children. Because of their lack of experience, they do not yet possess what Forman refers to as “adult discount,” and, so, he suggests, “it is the absence of criticism, the wide-eyed acceptance of the screen as a transcript of life which makes seeing a movie so thrilling and soul-stirring an experience to the young” (p. 101).

Another part of the answer may lie in the very nature of the medium itself. The movies confront the viewer multi-sensorally. Not only are both seeing and hearing involved in the experience, but the experience *is* a “confrontation” of sorts; much of what is transmitted is received predominately through the senses, and physically impacts the viewer. On the other hand, what is transmitted through print is mediated by the reading process. As the words are viewed on the page, the “picture” must be cognitively created through a process of decoding and construction, which accordingly, to some degree removes the interaction from the realm of direct experience. Leh and Gazda (1993) cite Sava (1981), noting that visual images can move an individual to “an internal activity [emotion] which does not realize information perceived from the outside world as such, but transforms it to be meaningful to the relation of the individual to the world” (p. 11), and conclude that “the individual can be stimulated and held by the emotion caused by the images” (p. 54).

Video, then, is clearly a dominant force in our society, and has secured an increasingly weighty role in our classrooms. “Although the motion picture is primarily an agency for amusement, it is no less important as an influence in shaping attitudes and social values,” says Forman (p. 3). In fact, he goes so far as to call it “a supplementary

educational system for our nation” (p. 6), and states that “clearly, in the light of these facts, what the screen becomes is a gigantic educational system with an instruction possibly more successful than the present text-book variety” (p. 64). Baines (1997) agrees: “Motion pictures serve as a potent medium of education” (p. 547). Further, he summarizes the findings of a multitude of researchers on the issue: “As books transport us through a ‘lived-through’ experience with words (Rosenblatt, 1978), so films offer an aesthetic ‘lived-through’ experience with pictures” (p. 545). The question at the heart of this study, then, is whether these two “lived-through” experiences differ significantly with regard to the development of historical thinking in students.

### **Research questions**

Thus was the impetus for my interest in this project. The importance of this question is obvious for any evaluation of the potential and effects of reading in the classroom. Further, although most educators agree that audio and video can be powerful educational media, it has been suggested by some that the very nature of some of the problems which may be addressed through the use of bibliotherapy with some children may themselves be, partially, at least, media-induced. In particular, there is speculation concerning whether some behavioral and/or cognitive deficiencies, such as short attention span or lack of critical thinking skills, may be due in part to the mode in which children today receive and process information on a daily basis; namely, television and other predominately electronic visual media. Referring to the apparent explosion in diagnosed cases of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) in our schools, Edward Hallowell and John

Ratey (1994) observe in their book *Driven to Distraction*: “American society tends to create ADD-like symptoms in us all. The fast pace. The sound bite. The quick cuts. The TV remote-control clicker” (Wallis, 1994, p. 48). It would appear, then, that the question of choice of medium used for aiding the personal growth and development of historical thinking in our students is, indeed, a critical one.

My overarching research question revolves around the issue of the relative costs and benefits to students of the technological shift in the presentation of school curricula today. In other words, it seems that students today do less reading and obtain their “knowledge” increasingly through more sensory media: audio and visual, in particular. This raises the question of “knowledge” versus “information,” a distinction which is quite germane to any dialogue on the subject of historical thinking. Students today have access to an incredible amount of information, via computers, television, and other technological advances, which is quickly and readily available. Riley (2001) Offers this perspective:

Today, unlike the print-rich decades of our grandparents and great-grandparents, children and adolescents who will soon enter adulthood and public life have come to understand their own and past worlds largely through surreal electronic platforms such as movies, television, and the Internet. This space-age generation knows what it knows through mass-media presentations and visual symbols, which often discourage sustained and thoughtful attention to the past. Hence, this sound byte approach to information or evidence gathering serves as a barrier to in-depth analysis and perspective taking, both of which are required for historical understanding (p. 139).

Thus more can be “learned” in less time than ever before, but we must question the *type* of learning taking place. Furthermore, this whole idea of efficiency illuminates another issue: the time factor, a question posed by Yeager and Doppen (2001, p. 111). As noted earlier, while most teachers agree unquestioningly with the notion that “reading is good

for kids,” most feel that it is just an impossibility within the framework and time constraints of today’s classroom. This raises the concern of the practicality and feasibility of proposing to increase the amount of reading done by students today. And finally, there is the basic issue of whether some types of learning (or learners) are better served by different media, as suggested by Shiring (1990).

The study reported here was originally conceived as a follow-up to Rubin’s study, specifically addressing these questions as they impact the classroom, specifically the social studies classroom. My focus was to better understand the dynamics of both the reading and the viewing process. In particular, I wanted to explore the question of whether the principles of bibliotherapy and the transactional theory of reading have any relevance for the classroom. Specifically, my research focus concerned the question of whether the dynamics of bibliotherapy and transaction theory apply exclusively to the print medium, or whether they are equally informative, as some bibliotherapists maintain, of video as well. In other words, is this process which describes the powerful effects of the interaction between reader and text equally appropriate to describe the interaction between viewer and film? Are there any differences between the meanings constructed by readers and those constructed by viewers as a result of their respective interactions with the medium, and, if so, do bibliotherapy and transactional theory in any way help elucidate explanations for these differences? And finally, is the nature of the processes of historical thinking notably impacted by the nature of the medium employed during instruction?

### **Comparative studies**

Although not addressing the question of historical thinking specifically, some studies have attempted to elucidate differences between the two media with regard to the learning process, although most focus on television as the visual medium. After a review of the literature relating to studies comparing print and video, Postman (1985) concluded that “television viewing does not significantly increase learning, is inferior and less likely to than print to cultivate higher-order, inferential thinking” (p.152). Also citing various studies, Splaine (1991) indicates that “researchers have concluded that reading leads to more inferential and knowledge-based meanings than those produced by television, which are more concrete and detached from previous knowledge” (p. 303). Neuman (1997), in her review of comparative studies, concluded that “different media presentations (television, storybooks, radio, film) do elicit slightly different interpretations of a story which are based on the medium’s attributes like sound, moving pictures, and print” (p. 17). She specifically cites Bagley and Hunter’s (1992) notion of interactivity, stating that “reading and new technologies like CD-ROM [as opposed to television and film]...are thought to more actively involve the child in the construction of meaning. Reading challenges children to become participants in their own learning” (p. 17). Further, she notes that the findings of Meringhoff (1980) indicate that “the more subtle skills of drawing on one’s prior knowledge” are more evident among children who had had a story read to them, as contrasted with those who had viewed an animated version of the story (p. 16).

### **Pilot study**

These findings were reinforced by the findings of a pilot study conducted with high school students (Scott, 2000) in which the responses of students who read the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* were compared with those of students who had watched the film version of that novel. There was little difference between the groups regarding expressed emotional responses: sad, angry, depressed, frustrated, grateful, nor in historical insights, although only the book group had a name—"Hoovervilles" to assign to the migrant camps. The biggest differences emerged within the context of philosophical insights. Though the movie groups tended to share and discuss insights concerning the people who lived during the Depression (admiration/anger directed toward individuals or groups, the will to survive, human nature, respect for poor, gratefulness for what we have today), the book group's discussions focused on larger social and religious issues (Steinbeck's socialistic perspective, responsibility for fellow human beings, "the sin thing," whether people need something to fight for, the role of cultural differences, the "oversoul" concept, existentialism). Obviously, these themes predominated in the book; less so—or perhaps less obviously—in the movie. Also, it is difficult to determine the extent, if any, to which individuals within the book group internalized these perspectives, or if they were held only by the speakers. Still, it is interesting to note the course of the discussions in each group, since both groups were given the same initial prompts to begin the discussion.

After all the students had encountered both media, they were asked to respond to one final questionnaire, probing their opinions on each type of medium. The students overwhelmingly evaluated the print version of the novel as more effective for themselves

personally. Only four out of forty-three students responding felt that the movie had proven more beneficial overall to them. This was an interesting finding, since on the first survey, twenty-two respondents indicated that they considered themselves to be “visual” learners, preferring “watching” to reading or listening. Another nine ranked “listening” as their preferred method of learning. Therefore, nearly three-fourths of the students initially expressed a preference for learning in some manner *other than* reading.

Almost universal themes which predictably emerged included time (“quicker,” “fast and easy,” “shorter,” “less time consuming,” “the book...takes too long”) and the visual element (“helping me to actually visualize,” “you can hear...and see the characters and...the land,” “visual imagery”) as advantages for film; corresponding benefits for books were depth (“much more insight,” “better understanding,” “so detailed and vivid,” “the book...made the movie seem shallow and not comprehensive,” “more detailed and complex,” “I got so much more out of the book”) and involvement of imagination (“you get to use your imagination,” “I was able to pretend like I was a part of it,” “allowed you to use more of your brain, reading, thinking, imagination,” “allows you imagination to run wild,” “I liked my way better than the movie!”).

Almost to a person the students emphasized the higher level of involvement that they experienced with the novel as opposed to the movie. Responses indicate that students felt that the book “puts you right into the story”; “I felt like I was one of the family and I felt all the emotions they did,” “you become closer to the characters,” “I cared about them more,” and “I really got to feel the pain they felt.” Furthermore, “the book envelopes the reader,” “I am more participatory in the action, and gain a fuller understanding of the



events and their implications,” and “characters were described better, so it was natural that I found myself thinking about their desperation after I had read the book.” The movie, on the other hand, “told the basic story without the reader having to strain too much to understand it” (this was listed as an advantage to the movie), “the movie ‘gave’ you what you should feel” (likewise an advantage), “had less emotional ties,” “takes less effort,” and allows the viewer “to relax and enjoy more.” Thus, whether it was viewed as an advantage or a drawback, students almost unanimously agreed that the book provided/demanded a higher level of involvement from the reader than did the movie for the viewer.

Other themes that emerged were unanticipated. Many students indicated a belief that the book appeared to them as somehow more “real” than the movie. This sentiment was reflected in comments such as the following: the print version “was a more real story,” the characters were more real,” the general chapters...made it more real,” and “I believed it more.” However, some students felt the film version made the story more realistic: one preferred “the movie because it was black and white and it had more real images”; another felt that “the movie lets you see the people in a more real situation.”

One final observation with regard to these final comparative evaluations by the students is that all spiritual or moral insights related were attributed to the reading of the novel. Typical of these reported insights were the following, listed as perceived benefits from reading the book: “I thought a lot about Casey’s idea of the one big family or soul after reading the book”; “I benefited most from the spiritual insights presented by Casy (sic) in that we are all spirits in one big spiritual piece”; “From the book, I have thought

about Casey and Tom because I liked their independence and have thought about people I see every day if they match up to them”; and “I thought more about how everyone hated the Oakies (sic), how the rich were getting richer by absolutely devastating (sic) the poor, and what obstacles a poor man had to overcome, in reading the book.”

As with any pilot study, the results raised as many questions as it answered: What role did the time differential between reading a novel and viewing a film play in the development of historical thought? Did differing methods of data collection (response journals vs. a questionnaire) contribute to differences in the nature of responses? Was the acquired scholastic “baggage” of these achievement-oriented high school students a factor in explaining their experience with each medium? These questions, along with those raised throughout this review of the literature, informed the methodology of the current study, presented in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Study Design**

The structure of this study is situated within an interpretivist paradigm; that is, it is based upon a “central research interest in human meaning in social life and its elucidation and exposition by the researcher” (Erickson, 1986, p. 119). It is my belief that interpretation is not something we choose to employ or not. Schwandt cites Rabinow and Sullivan (1987), who “claim that the activity of interpretation is not simply a methodological option open to the social scientist, but rather the very condition of human inquiry itself” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 119), and notes that one cannot escape the hermeneutical nature of the process of meaning making: interpretivists “focus on the process by which these meanings are created, negotiated, sustained, and modified within a specific context of human action” (p. 120). Citing Taylor, he further reminds us that “inquirers not only have no ‘transcendental ground from which to contemplate the process of which (they are) irretrievably a part’ (Bauman, 1978, p. 17), but they participate in the very production of meaning via participation in the circle of... interpretations,” and offers Schutz’ surmisal that “thus the constructs of the social sciences are constructs of the second degree. . . constructs of the constructs made by actors on the social scene” (p. 121).

I embrace the notion that we can “deny the opposition of subjectivity and objectivity and overcome it by accepting the hermeneutical character of existence” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). Further, I support Evertson and Green’s (1985) framework

which vividly demonstrates “the interplay of personal observation with a theoretical rationale that leads to focusing the research question and making decisions about where to go, what to look for, and how to ask questions during real-world observations” (Marshall & Rossman, 1994, p. 19). Thus the focus of this study coincides with Erickson’s (1986) proposal that “even though the stance of the fieldworker is not manifestly evaluative. . .issues of effectiveness are crucial in interpretive research” (p. 122).

This paradigm placement had profound implications for the study design, data generation, and data analysis, as well as for the role of the researcher. Marshall and Rossman (1994) stress “the unique strengths of this paradigm for research that is exploratory or descriptive, that assumes the value of context and setting, and that searches for a deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon” (p. 39). The theory undergirding current reading instruction/practice emphasizes the social nature of reading; reading is viewed as a social, rather than an individual, activity, in which meaning is constructed by the individual reader as a result of shared responses to the reading. Thompkins (1997) describes it thusly:

Literature-based reading classrooms are social settings in which students read, discuss, and write about literature. Together, students and their teachers create the classroom community, and the type of community they create strongly influences students’ learning. . .Teachers and students work collaboratively and purposefully. Perhaps the most striking quality of classroom communities is the partnership that teacher and students create (p. 7).

Likewise, bibliotherapy research has traditionally emphasized the role of the facilitator/guide in the process. Hynes (1986) maintains that “the process of growth. . .is centered not as much in the act of reading as in the guided dialogue about the material”

(p. 11). Similarly, Adler & Clark (1991) emphasize the importance of “facilitated discussion” (p. 2), and Pardeck (1991) cites Zaccaria and Moses in proclaiming that “there is virtual agreement in the studies on bibliotherapy that after a book is read, discussion or counseling must follow” (p. 205). Further, although Eidsvik (1978) proposes that movies offer the viewer “perceptual privacy,” discussion following the viewing of the movie for the purposes of elucidation of themes and sharing of insights again manifest the social and interactive nature of the learning situation. Consequently, my activities were an integral part of this learning community, and their effects will be addressed with regard to the specifics of each learning environment during data analysis. They were not “controlled for,” except insofar as I attempted to structure discussions, response invitations, and other means of data collection in as similar a manner as possible across the two environments; they will instead be fully and accurately reported, along with my “own feelings, perceptions, experiences, and insights *as part of the data*” (Patton, 1990, p. 58, emphasis in original).

The design of this study closely resembles Patton’s “Mixed Form: experimental design, qualitative data, and content analysis” as described in Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, p. 140), although rather than an “experimental” and “control” group,” one might say that there were two “experimental groups” (i.e., each receiving a different “treatment.”) However, I believe it may be more accurate to describe the setting as more “naturalistic” than “experimental,” since “experimental” conjures up connotations of extensive controls, and that two different groups are being observed simultaneously.

Thus this case may be more truthfully considered a case study, using Stake's (1994) conception of an *instrumental case study*:

A particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory. The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. The case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, but because this helps us pursue the external interest. The case may be typical of other cases or not . . . The choice of case is made because it is expected to advance our understanding of that other interest (p. 237).

Although mindful of Stake's (1994) advice that "Custom is not so strong that researchers (other than graduate students) will get into trouble by calling anything they please a case study" (p. 237), I believe that this methodology was appropriate for the purposes of this study.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were seventh grade students at a suburban public school.

The students involved are part of a "pull-out" gifted language arts program. The justification for this sample selection is predominately logistic: It was minimally intrusive upon both the curriculum and scheduling issues. The language arts curriculum provides a large degree of flexibility; additionally, the group was already divided into two comparatively homogenous groups, one meeting on Tuesday mornings, the other on Wednesdays. Each group consisted of seven students. The teacher also had both groups for an afternoon study session one day a week.

Sample selection was informed by the concept of purposeful sampling only insofar as Erlandson et. al. (1993) note that the researcher "must decide who and what to

study, that is, the sources that will most help to answer the basic research questions and fit the basic purpose of the study” (p. 83). The reasoning process through which these decisions were made is described below.

The selection of this sample type represents a compromise, or trade-off, of sorts. As Patton (1990) states, “Purposes, strategies, and trade-offs—these themes go together. A discussion of design strategies and trade-offs is necessitated by the fact that *there are no perfect research designs*. There are always trade-offs” (p. 162, emphasis in original). My objective was to make observations which would have maximal interest for individuals within the school setting, and, at the same time, to structure a learning environment that would maximally illuminate the issues in question. The level of reader interaction being discussed makes the assumption of facile, fluent, and interested readers (Brown, 1975). I wanted students with mature enough thought processes and sufficient life experiences to be able to analyze and articulate their experiences, and also to obtain two relatively homogeneous populations. Thus, although predominately white academically successful students residing in a suburban school district may not be viewed as “typical” students, I felt that this type of sample would help to more clearly illuminate the dynamics of the processes under study. Additionally, I believe that, since the investigation was conducted within a relatively typical school routine, the sample did not seriously compromise what Tashikkori and Teddlie (1998) refer to as the “quality of inferences” (p. 62). After all, as these researchers maintain, “some degree of generalizability...of *conclusions/ inferences* is important to all researchers” (p. 66). In summary, I believe that the apparent sacrificing of “generalizabilty” helped increase the “purposefulness” of the process. While the

specific responses of this group of “gifted” students may not be representative of students in general, the thought processes involved in their historical constructions are representative of those engaged in by all students (and may be more clearly observable.)

The school district as a whole is relatively racially homogenous: 95% of the students are white. The median income in the district is \$44,427; 46.1% of the parents are employed in administrative/professional positions, and 6.1% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The school district has been consistently rated “Excellent” according to Ohio Department of Education testing standards criteria, the high school graduation rate is 95%, and 75% of graduating seniors are college-bound. The middle school (which consists of grades seven and eight) draws from the entire district (unlike the elementary schools), and reflects similar test score ratings. Criteria for acceptance into the gifted program include: 1) a minimum I.Q. score of 127 (as measured either by the Iowa Basic Skills Test or, more recently, InVue testing, and 2) a score above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile in at least two state achievement tests, one of which must be either math or language arts. Once a student has been identified as qualifying for the program, (s)he remains so for the remainder of his/her academic career within the school district.

All students in the selected classes were asked to participate in the study. Several weeks before the study was to begin I met with the students who would be participating, introducing myself and giving them a general description of the study. I explained that they would arbitrarily be divided into two groups, and outlined procedures and expectations for the investigation, and asked for questions, of which there were none. At this time I distributed the parental consent and student assent forms, clarifying the purpose



and meaning of the forms, and again inviting questions. The signed documents were received from all students by the end of the week, and I received no feedback/questions from parents or students at this time.

### **Data generation**

The nature of historical thinking is manifested by two distinct sets of abilities. One set involves the development of deeper, richer understandings of personalities and events in the past, evidenced in the form of empathy, a strong sense of time and place, an understanding of causation and the complexity of issues. The other facet of historical thinking involves what Wineburg (1991) describes as a critical approach to information: questioning sources and evaluating the relationship of new information to knowledge gleaned from other sources. Data generation was informed by a desire to investigate the development of historical thinking along both these this axis.

The novel selected for this study was *The Education of Little Tree* by Forrest Carter (University of New Mexico Press, 1976). Several criteria informed this selection. First and foremost, the selected novel needed to represent a critically claimed piece of literature, which offered ample opportunities for students to engage in the construction of historical understandings. Second (and what proved to be particularly difficult), there had to be a similarly acclaimed film version of the book. Third, the book needed to be age-appropriate for the sample selected. This book met all three conditions.

In an attempt to increase the potential transferability of the findings of this study, data was generated from several sources and by several methods. One of the difficulties

that emerged from the pilot study was the discrepancy between the two groups with regard to data collection, most notably in terms of the time factor, which may have significantly impacted the overall nature of the learning experience for the different groups. I attempted to address this shortcoming in several ways. The selection of intermediate students was an attempt to reduce the amount of accumulated “educational baggage” which appeared to influence the responses of some of the high school students. I also attempted to narrow the time differential between the reading of the book and the viewing of the film, so as to more closely approximate the ideal of similar experiences for each group. Finally, an effort was made to structure the actual collection of data from the two groups in as parallel a manner as possible, given the obvious differences in delivery modes of the two media. My methods for collecting data are outlined as follows:

- 1) Pre-and post-reading/viewing survey questions (See Appendix A)
- 2) Journal entries
- 3) Class discussions (See Appendix B for questions)
- 4) Individual interviews (See Appendix B for questions)
- 5) Follow-up interviews (See Appendix B for questions)

### **Pre-reading/viewing measures**

At the first “official” meeting with each group, the students were informed as to which group they would be in: the Tuesday class, which consisted of two girls and five boys, became the “movie group”; the Wednesday class, comprised of three girls and four boys, the “book group.” During this meeting, I attempted to give each group as identical an introduction to the study as possible.

I began by distributing the questionnaire in Appendix A (Pre- and Pre-Post Study Questions only.) Responses to these questions were to serve as reference point in

comparison with responses given after reading and viewing—for the purpose of insuring that both groups began from relatively similar positions, as well as to chart potential movement from that position. Also included in the survey were items that indicated the students' attitudes toward and habits concerning reading. I felt this information might aid in explaining any discrepancies that might become evident within each group concerning the quality of the students' experiences with each medium.

After students completed the questionnaire, I wanted to establish a consistent historical context for all the students; thus I asked them if they knew what the Trail of Tears was (about half of the students in each group had “heard of it”) and then showed a brief (five-minute) clip from an “educational” movie which depicted this episode in the context of relations between the United States government and the Native Americans. Included in this excerpt was a specific indication that “many Cherokee died during the journey; that is why the Cherokee called it ‘the Trail of Tears’.” (The implication was that the Cherokee gave this name to the relocation, reflecting *their* grief (i.e. tears) regarding the event. This contrasts with the account given by Willow John in the story: he states: “The Cherokee never cried, but looked straight ahead,” and indicated that it was the tears of the anguished onlookers that bestowed upon the event its historical moniker.) I also offered a brief account of Prohibition, so that the students might have some framework for understanding the grandfather's occupation in the story (i.e., that making “moonshine” was illegal.)

I then described in more detail the nature of the study: that it was prompted by a desire to better understand the nature of historical thinking, as well as by a frustration

with its apparent lack of emphasis in most history classrooms. I recounted the recurrent interest/concern in the professional literature pertaining to the lack of interest/enthusiasm by students for history/ social studies, and invited them to share their observations and opinions regarding their experiences with history to date. The movie (Tuesday) group was relatively quiet and unresponsive; the book (Wednesday) group was much more animated and eager to share “horror stories” of their history experiences. (This group was likewise more involved during the viewing of the film clip; one student asked “Couldn’t he [Jackson] have just vetoed it?” [when the Supreme Court declared the Indian Removal Act unconstitutional.] A brief explanation of the separation of powers ensued.) At this point I also revealed the controversy surrounding this particular novel. (There is considerable debate concerning its authenticity; indeed it has been reclassified in many libraries as “historical fiction” rather than “autobiography.”) I asked the students to consider what, if any, effect this debate might have on the contribution of this book/movie to historical understanding. Again, the book group exhibited more interest and enthusiasm to discuss the issue: one girl asked if it’s similar to the “Oprah book guy” (James Frey). I am not sure how to explain this difference between the groups. Students originally were assigned randomly into their respective classes (Tuesday or Wednesday). I thought perhaps it was due to my demeanor; maybe I was more relaxed the second day of the study, and thus presented a more open or inviting atmosphere. The teacher did indicate that she felt that the Wednesday group was more sociable; however, as the movie group progressed through the study the students exhibited quite a bit of sociability themselves! I will return to this question at a later point.

## **Journals**

At this time I detailed for the students the nature of their participation in the study. Meeting first with the movie group (Tuesday), I explained what I would like them to do, i.e., to give me a “peek inside” their heads as they processed the film while watching it. I told them that I would be stopping the movie after each “scene,” and that I would like them to jot down their thoughts at that point in the journal provided. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) describe journals as “a powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experiences,” and quote May Sarton (1982): “Journals are a way of finding out where I really am” (p. 421). The guidelines given for these responses were simple and open-ended, as an attempt to avoid prejudicing or anticipating students’ responses to their experience. Deviating from their regular method of journaling, in which they are asked to note specific literary themes, techniques, characteristics, vocabulary, and/or information, students were prompted simply to record impressions/reactions to each scene on whatever level(s) it impacted them: emotional, philosophical, historical, spiritual, etc. I asked them to use the following question as a starting point for each entry: “Okay, so what did Little Tree ‘learn’ here?” (noting that the title is *The Education of Little Tree*.) I instructed them to write anything else that struck them as significant—any thoughts, emotions, insights (historical or personal) or what their teacher calls “aha” moments.” They seem to understand their task, as they were accustomed to journaling as a matter of course for this particular teacher. I tried to emphasize that this was not to be an analytical response to the movie per se (in other words, not a critique of the movie), but rather a record of their initial, personal responses to the movie as the story

progressed. Journals were not kept by the movie group participants in the original study; I felt that this procedure would yield a set of data that will be more analogous to the reading journals.

When I met with the book group, I again explained to the students the nature of their participation. I informed them that they would be doing basically the same thing as the movie group: after each chapter, they were to record their reactions/thoughts, using the same springboard question. The teacher had informed me at our last meeting that these students (the book group) would be doing an independent project for her during this time using this same book. (All of her students were involved in such a project using historical fiction. In fact, all the seventh grade language arts students were doing a novel unit; this teacher had set hers up to coincide with my project.) All of this teacher's students were choosing an historical novel and writing journal responses for the purpose of creating two presentations (focusing on vocabulary, style, theme, etc.) The movie group would choose their book; the book group was to use *Little Tree* for that project as well. (I think the teacher's reasoning was that this would keep the book group from feeling that they were having to do more "work" than the group that "just" watched the movie.)

Initially, I was not aware that the two projects were to be conducted simultaneously. After explaining their "assignment" to the participants in book group, I began to question whether this "dual" approach might impact the study more than I had anticipated. The teacher had told the students to put her requirements "on hold" until they finished their "part for [me]," yet told them to use stickie notes to mark the passages they

will be using for their assignment for her. Most of the students indicated that they didn't feel it would be a problem. Still, I felt that they would obviously not be reading the book just to experience it—certainly not from the aesthetic stance. I was also somewhat concerned that their graded assignment would assume the highest priority in terms of their attention to the novel. In fact, during class reading time I observed most students taking notes and placing “stickies” on pages with reference to their projects. At this point I made the following entry in my reflexive journal:

I guess the impact remains to be seen. Perhaps it is actually more realistic, since kids very rarely get to read just to experience a work within the school setting. Still, it was hoped this study might help illuminate a model for a better approach to the use of historical fiction in the social studies classroom. We'll see...

Upon reflection, though it may indeed have been more “realistic” in terms of standard classroom practice, I do believe it somewhat compromised the objective of the study. I think that asking students to focus on stylistic and predominately literary aspects of the story somewhat undermined the emphasis on historical thinking. I also think that this approach may have also contributed (although it was by no means the sole source) to a growing negativity that I began to detect among the readers. There began to develop a sense of resentment as expressed by one student in response to my query as to whether he was enjoying the book: “It's not a book I would have chosen, and it's hard for me to get past that when I'm reading it.” I will return to this issue of disinclination during data analysis.

In directing both the reading/viewing and journaling, particular attention was given to the notion of *stance*, as it pertains to the transactional theory. Rosenblatt argued

that the most effective way to read fiction was from the aesthetic stance, allowing the reader to focus on the “lived through” experience of reading. Without this experience, Rosenblatt contends, readers are less likely to experience the possibility of using reading to contemplate themselves and others—to experience what Bruner (1986) called the subjunctive, when the reader considers “what if” and “if I were.” However, according to Galda and Liang (2003), “the social studies are still filled with suggestions for practice that ask students to read from an efferent stance, even when reading fiction” (p. 270).

In over 35 articles in the past 20 years, the various tasks suggested and methods of approach to historical fiction in the social studies class reflect a strongly efferent approach to fictional texts. Rosenblatt (1991) expressed concern about this confusion when she said, “I hope that [teachers] will not confuse students by using ‘literary works’ (poetry and fiction) in such a way that students read them efferently, for the primary purpose, let us say, of learning historical data” (p. 447). Unfortunately, her concern is often warranted when narrative texts and poems are used in social studies classrooms (p. 273).

These researchers postulate that this discrepancy creates confusion over the role of literature in the social studies classroom, and further that it may explain why “efforts to generate enthusiasm and interest through literature sometimes fall short, and teachers are disappointed to find that the book did not generate the magic they were counting on” (p. 268). Beck, Nelson-Faulkner, and Pierce (2000) echo this concern with creating “a certain tension for teachers between using [historical fiction] as a teaching tool to provide insights into a time period, and using the text as a work of fiction to be experienced as a ‘lived-through’ event” (p. 546). Vansledright (2004) suggests that “history-specific literacy heuristics (such as Wineburg’s sourcing and corroboration heuristics) be applied during the reading process, to counter the “textual fundamentalist’ epistemology” prevalent among both history teachers and students (p. 344). Students in the study were



directed as much as possible, then, toward a more aesthetic stance in the approach to their encounters with this story, in an attempt to generate data relevant to the development and comparison of historical understanding involving deeper understandings of one person's experience.

Following the introductory phase in both classes we embarked on what would be our *modus operandi* for the next four weeks during class time. (As the Language Arts bloc for these students is an hour long, about fifteen to twenty minutes remained for both classes.) While watching the film, the students in this group continued to be very quiet. When I paused the movie after the first scene for them to write down their reflections, one student asked, "What if I don't think he learned anything?" I replied that this was just a "jumping off" point that I would like them to really reflect on; if they truly felt Little Tree had learned nothing in that scene, they should write whatever they were thinking about that part of the movie. As the movie progressed, they seemed to "warm up" to it a bit. Small chuckles were audible during appropriate scenes; there was chatter and giggling concerning misunderstood names. This all raised in my mind the issue of the influence of the viewing environment upon the viewing experience. There were no bells; near the end of the time period I asked if it was time to go. The students replied that they still had three minutes. When those minutes had passed, the students began to "fidget;" I stopped the movie, collected their papers, and dismissed them.

For the book group, only about fifteen minutes remained after the introduction (probably due to the higher level of interaction.) It took the class a few minutes to settle

into reading; once they did, they read intently and quietly. Again, no bell; the students seemed to instinctively know when it was time to leave.

In the weeks that follow, we followed this routine as consistently as a school setting allows. (We sometimes got started late due to assemblies, problems getting video equipment, etc.) This impacted the movie group more than the book group, and reinforced my concern with the notion of the impact of the viewing environment. Any type of distraction or reaction from fellow viewers often seemed to set or alter the disposition of the class, and, it occurred to me, perhaps the perception and process of individual students' construction of meaning while watching the film. Another observation I made during this time was that some students were beginning to take notes during the viewing time (presumably so they wouldn't forget ideas or observations they wanted to write in their journals—even though there was never more than five minutes of viewing time before the movie was paused for them to write their reflections.) Likewise, sometimes students began to ask questions during the viewing. I felt both of these practices were causing students to miss some of the content of the movie, as well as interfering with the "telling of the story;" I therefore requested that students refrain from these behaviors and save questions or comments for the reflection period between each scene. These developments also encouraged my interest in examining the role of the teacher in the development of historical thinking, which again I will address during data analysis.

During the remainder of the study period I met with each group once a week, following this format, until both book and movie were completed, which turned out to be

four weeks. The students appeared to be comfortable with the routine and with me. (In fact, one week, their teacher was absent; the principal authorized us to proceed as usual in her absence—the school had not procured a sub.) I collected journals from both classes each week, limiting feedback to reminders that they should reflect as deeply and on as many levels as possible. The book group read very quietly each week. I observed students writing in their journals, and, still, marking places with stickie notes. Most of these students read at a comparable pace; one student finished the book quite a bit earlier than the others, but had not written reflections after each chapter. This student spent the last two class periods writing his reflections. Although this was not what he had been instructed to do, I thought that his might provide an interesting comparison to the other students' responses.

### **Post-reading/viewing measures**

Upon completion of the book and movie, each participant again completed the initial questionnaire (pre-post questions only) in an attempt to measure and document any changes of attitudes or any other growth which may have occurred as a result of this experience. Subsequently, I facilitated a class discussion with each group, which was taped (audio only.) I had compiled four questions which I intended to ask in order of each class, and to direct the answers/conversation as minimally as possible. (See Appendix B for discussion questions.) These proved to be the least “scientific” of the data due to the nature of class discussions themselves (and also due to the nature of my less-than-state-of-the-art recording equipment.) While the same initial questions were

posed to both groups, individuals within the groups tended to focus on particular areas of interest/concern, which led the discussion in disparate directions. Still, some interesting trends did emerge from the analysis of these discussions.

Following this classroom phase of the project, I spent the next two weeks interviewing students during their study hall period. These interviews were likewise taped. Each interview lasted approximately fifteen minutes, and were conducted in a “room” adjacent to their classroom (actually a backstage area) which was a spot often utilized by this class as an individual work area. The first part of the interview was dedicated to attempting to allow the students to clarify and elaborate upon their journal entries. The questions in the second part of the interview (See Appendix C) were designed to illuminate various aspects of historical understanding.

This mode of data generation represents a modification of the original study which was added based on the realization that writing may not be the most comfortable or expressive mode of response for many students, and thus many reactions may have been shortened, or even unreported, in the original study because of students’ inability—or unwillingness—to fully articulate their answers through writing. It was hoped that the addition of this source of data might reveal more fully the process by which students develop historical insights.

The final phase of the study took place approximately two months later. I returned to interview the students one last time during their study hall period. As with the previous interviews and discussions, these interviews were tape-recorded. Again, this was not done in the original study; I believed such a follow-up would help shed some

light on the question of the endurance of the development of historical thinking among the participants in each group. During these interviews students were asked four identical questions, the first of which was designed simply to discover what they remembered most about the film or book. The next two questions were designed to elicit an indication of the students' capacity to understand the perspective of the main character and how it might personally relate to them. The final question was an attempt to solicit from the students their perspective concerning this mode of data collection; I asked them to express their personal preference, as well as to indicate which method enabled them to give more complete answers.

In between the two sets of interviews, I was invited by the teacher to attend the students' historical novel presentations for her class. I felt these presentations might give me one more layer of insight into the students' interaction with the book, and so I welcomed the opportunity to attend. These presentations were not included in the examination of the data; while students did reveal some historical insights, I had no similar data from the movie group with which to compare their levels of understanding.

As might be expected, these methods yielded a substantial volume and variety of data. These data will be presented and analyzed in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

#### **Data analysis: Theoretical orientation**

Marshall and Rossman (1994) suggest that “the researcher should use the guiding hypotheses and related literature developed earlier in the proposal. This earlier grounding and planning can be used to suggest several categories that can serve to code the data initially for subsequent analysis” (p. 113). Huberman and Miles (1994, in Denzin & Lincoln) take it one step further:

The design of qualitative studies can in a real sense be seen as analytic. Choices of conceptual framework, of research questions, of samples, of the “case” definition itself, and of instrumentation all involve anticipatory data reduction—which . . . is an essential aspect of data analysis. These choices have a focusing and bounding function, ruling out certain variables, relationships, and associated data, and selecting others for attention. They also call for creative work (p. 431).

As both these views are consistent with the interpretivist orientation of this study, my search for categories was based upon both emergent and *a priori* themes. Huberman and Miles (1994) further remind us that, although we need a set of conceptually specified categories to discern relationships, “starting with them (deductively) or getting gradually to them (inductively) are both legitimate and useful paths” (p. 431).

In examining these themes, I utilized both manifest and latent content analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), that is, analysis focused on both “the surface meaning of a (response) and the underlying meaning of that narrative” (p. 121). The data was subjected to “categorizing” (in the words of Lincoln & Guba, as cited in Tashakkori &

Teddlie, 1998, p. 123) or “open coding” (to use the terminology of Strauss & Corbin, 1990) into emerging themes. These themes were informed by insights gleaned from research on historical thinking; in other words, by “sensitizing concepts,” (Patton, 1990). Patton suggests that “sensitizing concepts give the analyst ‘a general sense of reference’ and provide ‘directions along which to look’” (Blumer, 1969, p. 148). The inductive application of sensitizing concepts is to examine how the concept is manifest in a particular setting or among a particular group of people” (p. 391). Therefore, student responses were initially coded according to the nature of the content of the response (e.g., emotional, personal, historical, philosophical, intellectual, analytical, etc.), and these coded responses were further examined in terms of the various aspects of historical thought, e.g., the legitimacy of historical and/or philosophical insights, the depth and nature of personal connections with characters or events, evidence of empathy or a desire/capability to formulate creative solutions to social problems, or of what McKeown and Beck (1990) call “high knowledge: integration of events and the development of the theme of the text” (p. 689) that foster correct representations of domain-related concepts. I further categorized responses based on evidence that students were cognizant of such principles as sourcing and corroboration. So, an attempt was made to determine whether coded responses could be understood as reflecting various aspects of the emergent process of historical thinking. Thus, analysis focused on discerning themes among the students’ responses, employing Spradley’s (as cited by Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 125) “similarity and contrast principles.” Meaning was sought by identifying similarities in responses, both within and between (reading and movie) groups; likewise, differences

within and between groups were examined. These themes were then analyzed as manifestations of historical thinking principles. Reliance on insights gleaned from research on the reading and viewing processes were employed for the purpose of exploring possible explanations of trends yielded by the data.

This analytical scheme is further informed by the theoretical orientation of *hermeneutics*. According to Euchelberger (as cited in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), hermeneutists

are much clearer about the fact that they are *constructing* the “reality” on the basis of their interpretation of data with the help of the participants who provided the data in the study...If other researchers had different backgrounds, used different methods, or had different purposes, they would likely develop different types of reactions, focus on different aspects of the setting, and develop somewhat different scenarios (p. 85).

Thus my voice is prominent within the process of data analysis. Schwandt (1994, in Denzin & Lincoln) points out that “Interpretivist persuasions aligned with ontological hermeneutics transcend the phenomenologist’s concern with “capturing” the actors’ point of view, with verification, with discriminating between emic and etic perspectives” (p. 121). Citing Taylor, he concludes that “if our interpretations seem implausible or if they are not understood by our interlocutors, there is no verification procedure we can fall back on. We can only continue to offer interpretations; we are in an interpretive circle” (p. 121).

As far as trying to ensure the “quality” or “trustworthiness” of my findings, this study was conducted within the guidelines offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985). I strove for credibility (internal validity) by means of prolonged engagement, persistent observation (including the use of audio taping), my reflexive journal, and member



checking during interviews. Furthermore, triangulation was utilized, not only in the employment of several techniques for data generation, but also by including the observations of the teacher whenever available. Confirmability (“objectivity”) and dependability (“reliability”) were addressed again with the journal, and also by instituting a record-keeping system designed to produce a valid and reliable audit trail, and by being diligent in “reporting no ‘fact’ without noting its source and making no assertions without supporting data” (Erlandson, et. al., 1993, p. 151).

Finally, and most importantly for me, a concern for transferability is addressed through the employment of thick description and through the use of the reflexive journal. In addition, great care was taken to describe the theoretical frameworks which undergird this research, as well as my understanding of their application within this context. For, as Huberman and Miles (1994, in Denzin & Lincoln) remind us:

It is healthy medicine for researchers to make their preferences clear. To know how researchers construe the shape of the social world and how they mean to give us a credible account of it is to know just who we have on the other side of the table (p. 429).

### **Pre-study data**

The initial questionnaire, administered on the first day of the study, generated the following data. Concerning the Trail of Tears, over half of the students (eight of fourteen, about equally divided between the groups) did not know what it was; those who did answer realized that it was some sort of forced exodus with varying degrees of specificity and accuracy (e.g., “kicked out of their lands”; the path the Indians followed”; “when Indians were forced to walk across the U.S. and forced to settle in the North”).

Only four students (two from each group) attempted to explain why it was called this: “because it signified the loss of everything to them,” “people cried on it?” “many died,” and “it was depressing.”

Again, when asked about the “Indian way,” the majority (nine of fourteen) responded that they didn’t know. Answers given were brief and reflected vague but accurate basic tenets of Native American philosophy: “how they live and treat the environment,” “respect nature?” “the way Indians believe you should live life,” “thankful of nature,” and “the land can’t be owned.” Only two of these five offered their opinions concerning this outlook: “It’s a good one,” and “I like this idea but it wouldn’t work in today’s society.”

In response to the question about prejudice, only six students answered the question. Although most of these answers were on target, I did not include responses to this question in the analysis, since so few had answered the original question.

As far as the Pre-Study Only questions, all but one student indicated that they like to read (to varying degrees), and that student stated that “reading is okay.” Students were predictably divided concerning their preferred method of learning, but for most of the students it was “hands-on activity” (eight votes), with reading coming in a distant second (three votes.) There was variety as well regarding the least favored method, but again one method garnered the majority of votes: “lecture” (with seven votes). “Hands-on activity” and “movie/video” received 3 votes each for least preferred learning mode.

### **Journal entries**

Before presenting data generated by the journals, I would like briefly to address the issue of the inherent differences between print and film. It is commonly recognized that while films offer sound and visual interpretation not available to readers, books tend to provide a scope and depth of development not afforded to viewers. Accordingly, some characters in the novel were not included in the movie, and the explicit thought processes of *Little Tree* shared with the reader were more implicit in the film. Additionally, as was the case in the pilot study, some historical concepts were labeled in print but not in film; thus, only the book group used the term “sharecropper” to describe the little migrant girl (half of the respondents used the term in their journal entry; none of the viewers’ journals included the term.)

The focus of this study, however, is not on the differences between and/or advantages/disadvantages of each medium, but on potential differences in the mode of assimilation of the story by the learner across the two media. Hence, the film version of the book chosen is comparatively faithful to the novel. There are a few unexplained changes from the original story: Grandpa is white instead of half-Cherokee, an Indian boarding school is substituted for the religious orphanage, and the Christmas program becomes a Thanksgiving play. That these changes impact the story on various levels is undeniable. Still, the focus of the analysis was not on content so much as the processes through which students make meaning of the story as presented. Thus the analysis concentrated upon subject matter common to both genres; attention was concentrated on the number and nature of responses. With regard to the volume of response, it was

suggested to both groups to make entries following the completion of a chapter or scene, and all participants made entries solely during these natural breaks. The film guide listed twenty-six scenes; thus the movie was paused twenty-six times for reflection and journal entries, and students were provided unlimited time for this purpose. The book has twenty-one chapters, and likewise all readers took twenty-one opportunities for reflection/entries. Therefore, members of the movie group were accorded slightly more occasions for deliberation and recording.

Although the journal responses in general were disappointing with regard to both length and depth (possible explanations for which will be dealt with subsequently), data analysis did yield some notable trends. While participants in both groups were encouraged to go beyond the prompt and to explore their reactions to the story at multiple levels, both sets of responses concentrated predominantly on answering the question. Members of both groups were pretty consistent in the number of times they specifically addressed the question in their responses (about 60% for the readers, 68% for the viewers.) Both groups manifested a trend of decreasing attention given to the prompt as their entries progressed. This was undoubtedly due, at least to some extent, to my constant exhortations (resulting from my collecting and reading the journals each week) to use the prompt only “as a starting point” for their reflections.

More significant than the frequency with which the question was answered is the difference between the groups in the number of times the prompt was exclusively addressed in their responses, and in the nature of the responses. Students watching the film tended to limit their “reflections” to answering the question; additional “insights”

tended to consist of relating story events or offering critical observations of the movie. Book group participants were much more likely to develop their answers more fully, and to add their own opinions or insights concerning what Little Tree learned.

Further differentiation emerged regarding the content of the answers to the prompt “What did Little Tree learn?” Entries were coded as reflecting specific areas of learning on the part of the character, i.e., “practical/academic,” “personal/social,” “cultural/philosophical,” or “historical.” Students in the movie group were twice as likely to consign the character’s specific educational experience to one of the first three categories. However, with regard to responses in which the student indicated that the character had learned something which would be described as “historical,” the book group exceeded the movie group by 50%. It may be suggested that this might be due to historical themes being dealt with more extensively in the book; however, this was not the case. As noted earlier, analysis was concentrated on areas of commonality between the book and movie. Furthermore, as also noted, the viewers actually had more individual entries in their journals (twenty-six to the twenty-one in the reading group). Therefore, if anything, they had more opportunities to discern examples of historical learning by the character, since this area of Little Tree’s “education” was presented in the movie to the same extent as—if not to a greater extent than—in the novel.

Examination of other areas concerning the content of the answers to the actual prompt revealed further discrepancies. Responses that addressed prejudice as a factor in Little Tree’s experiences were again more common—three times more common—in the reactions of the movie group. This finding surprised me; this is obviously a theme in

both the book and the film, and every scene that portrayed prejudice in the movie was likewise portrayed in the book. In fact, there are some such scenes in the book which were omitted from the movie. A possible explanation of the difference between the groups is that perhaps this theme is more intentionally developed and more concentrated in the film; in effect, the interpretation has been made for the viewer and, being visually presented, is rather more “in your face” for the person watching the movie.

A final observation with regard to responses to the prompt: from their first entries, the movie group had a tendency to simply relate the story line in their entries. In one of the few ways that I deviated (perhaps the only time I intentionally did so) from giving identical treatment to the two groups, I reminded this group every time we met *not* to simply relate the plot in their journal entries. Still, students in this group recorded a whopping 178 entries which simply recounted events in the story, versus 24 such entries from the book group. I considered that this might be due to the setting: these students were writing exclusively in a school environment, during the pauses between scenes. Although I allocated as much time as they wanted to write and never pressured anyone to finish, students may yet have felt a pressure not to “hold up the group.” Though a great deal of the readers’ writing was also done during class time, it was nevertheless inherently a more individual and private experience.

However, I am not convinced that the time and/or setting factor is truly the key to understanding this disparity. In the first place, although the journal entries of the readers did tend to be longer, some of the entries of the viewers were as long as those of the readers and some of the readers’ responses were shorter than those of some viewers.

Furthermore, the entries of most of the readers could easily have been done in the time allotted to the viewers. Thus, I do not feel that the time factor explains this finding. Undoubtedly, the “social” nature of the classroom does not encourage serious reflection to the degree afforded one in the privacy of his/her home—or even in a classroom where everyone is quietly reading or writing. Nonetheless, the fact that they were explicitly exhorted against simple narration and had ample time and relative quiet to reflect diminishes the strength of this factor as an explanation. I think that part of the explanation may lie in the nature of the viewing experience itself; that is, these students are *watching* the story played out in front of them, and, when it is paused, are still processing it linguistically in their minds. Thus, retelling is their immediate response; though they have been directed not to do this, relating (or reliving) the story is the first reaction that comes to mind. Obviously more research is needed to explore this concept, and I will address this in the conclusions and implications of the study.

Besides categorizing the direct responses to the prompt, I further coded the journal entries according to the type of cognitive process manifested by the writer. Though entries of both groups evidenced the construction of generalizations to a similar degree, viewers of the movie made more judgments (by 50%), and their entries contained five times as many interpretive statements as those of their counterparts in the reading group. Additionally, they incorporated fourteen predictions into their reflections; only one entry from the book group included a prediction. And finally, although they had been steered away from critical analysis of the medium as a response, reactions of members of the movie group more often reflected attention to or evaluation of critical

elements of the film *as* film. Thus, they made note of the music or the element of tension or surprise, or questioned why a certain scene was included (although the film was ostensibly a memoir.) Although the readers criticized the author's style or questioned his motives, there were fewer of these types of entries in general (50% fewer), and they were normally not of the nature of critiquing the book's "entertainment" value, as were the comments from the movie group.

On the other hand, responses from the readers were twice as likely to express emotion or to reflect a personal identification with a character or event. Likewise, they engaged in self-dialogue or communicated personal insights twice as often as the movie group. Most notably, the journal entries of this group revealed some evidence of perspective taking three times as often as those in the movie group, and revealed some degree of development of historical thinking almost four times as often.

The final entries to the journals unfortunately did not yield a substantial amount of data. All entries were considerably short, particularly within the book group. In fact, two members of this group made no final entry at all. Both groups tended to evaluate the medium itself (both positively and negatively) in this final statement, the movie group almost exclusively so. Responses from the book group contained more emotional reactions, and one person in each group shared an experience of personally identifying with a character or event. Only in the book group did someone (one person) address the issue of authenticity/credibility, musing, "It's hard to believe it's a true story."

One interesting finding did emerge from this set of data. Only students in the movie group—and over half the members of this group—addressed the question of what



was learned, or what was “supposed” to be learned, by the student. All statements were vague: “I learned a lot,” “I learned a little about Indians,” “I don’t think I learned anything except some facts about Native Americans,” and “What was the point of it? How Indians were treated back then? To teach people about the Trail of Tears? And what the white men did to the colored men?” I’m not sure what (if anything) to make of this observation; I do find it interesting that these types of statements were made only by the movie group. They seem to imply a perception on the part of the students that a movie shown in class is accompanied by specific pedagogical expectations, and that perhaps this is not the case with a book, especially one encountered in language arts class. Whether these perceptions are accurate, what their source may be, and/or if they actually exist may be the subject of another study. In any case, while one may read some sort of “trends” into the data, the small quantity of responses makes any conclusion dubious.

### **Post-reading/viewing questions**

As with the final journal entries, data gleaned from answers to the pre-reading/viewing questions (which were re-answered after the students’ encounter with the story) were so scant that any inferences drawn from them must be made with reservations. Yet, regarding the three “pre/post” questions, a few observations may be made. In both groups, answers to the question concerning the Trail of Tears evidenced some degree of learning specific historical facts (e.g., “Cherokee” replaced “Indian,” and the destination became “western lands,” “Oklahoma,” or “the Nations” in lieu of previous

vaguely or erroneously named destinations.) All who had reported before the study that they knew nothing of the event now demonstrated a basic understanding (although to a person the phrase meant an actual “trail” that the Cherokee followed.) One interesting observation concerns the fact that, although the account of the Trail of Tears in the movie was almost verbatim the same as the account in the book (although delivered by different characters), and the point was strongly made in both that it was the weeping bystanders and not the Cherokee (“The Cherokee did not cry.”) for whom the incident was named, not one of the members of the movie group mentioned this “fact”; half of the members of the book group recorded this version.

With reference to the question pertaining to the “Indian Way,” although, again, the notion was dealt with specifically (and similarly) in both media, every respondent in the movie group who answered the question at all (two did not) gave vague explanations with references to “tradition,” “culture,” “land,” or “nature.” On the other hand, most of the book group responses (six out of seven) presented specific descriptions reflecting those presented in the book, i.e., taking only what one needs, taking the weakest over the strongest so the species survives, and respecting nature.

And finally, as regards the question about prejudice, answers from both groups tended to be short and vague, though four out of seven members in each group evinced some signs of increased complexity in their dealing with the issue. “Pre” responses that defined prejudice as treating others badly based on the way they look, or beliefs, or bad treatment, evolved into responses wrestling with notions of the perpetrator’s own doubts and insecurities, fear, feeling of power, and individual background. In both groups

answers were extremely varied, and no references to the book or movie were made, nor could any be readily inferred.

Regarding the five post-reading/viewing questions, responses again lacked sufficient depth to warrant a great deal of insight in terms of historical understanding. Nonetheless, some differentiation did emerge. Although both groups knew the story to be autobiographical in nature, and were told who the author was in the introduction to the study, half of the members of the movie group said they did not know who wrote it, and those who did listed “Little Tree” as the author. Not surprisingly, all members of the book group stated that Forrest Carter is the author. Both groups had been introduced to the controversy surrounding the book, and they displayed a corresponding similarity in replies regarding whether it was a “true story.” Five out of seven members in each group definitively answered yes, which surprised me given the lively discussions we had had on this concern before beginning. Each group also had one member who said “it’s *supposed* to be true.” Only two students displayed any sense of questioning the author’s credibility: one member of the movie group acknowledged, “I’m not sure if the book was a true story or not...But I am sure that what happened to Little Tree could just have (sic) well have happened to any Indian in the 1930’s,” and one member of the book group stated, “The cover says it’s a true story, but many people don’t think so.” Thus it does not appear that the medium can be implied as a contributory factor concerning this question.

As far as the setting of the story (question #2), most viewers and readers alike had an accurate sense of the time period (1930’s/Great Depression), only a few in each group

seemed aware of the specific location (mountains of eastern Tennessee). Both groups likewise perceived the era as a time when prejudice was predominant, implying that this distinguished the period from the present. Half of the students in the movie group mentioned Prohibition (not by name); no one in the book group included this aspect of the period in their description, although it was dealt with extensively in the book as a backdrop concerning Grandpa's "trade."

Descriptions of Little Tree's life (question #3) likewise exhibited similarity across the groups. Almost all students portrayed his life as "hard" or "difficult," but also emphasized the "happy" or "fun" times. In both groups, only one student indicated that (s)he would like to be Little Tree. All but one student in the movie group indicated they would like to have him as a friend; only half of the book group expressed this choice. Most students did not offer explanations for these opinions, and of those who did, most were simplistic and/or superficial. Only one student in each group presented explanations reflecting any amount of perspective taking or insight into the character.

In terms of assessing how representative the story might be (question #4), most students revealed considerable ambiguity. In fact, several in each group provided conflicting answers that, yes, he was typical but, no, this was not an accurate portrayal of Indian life in the '30's, or vice versa. What I ultimately garnered from these responses is that almost all students had a sense that his lifestyle was probably atypical for most Native American boys of his era, but that his experiences of prejudice and his concentration on his culture probably reflected the experience of most Native Americans

of his day. Thus, both groups seemed to have grasped the idea of the particular within the general, which is an important notion in the development of historical thinking.

And finally, to the question of whether Little Tree was “educated” (question #5), the unanimous response in both groups was yes. All students acknowledged that his education went beyond formal schooling: he knew “the ways of the Cherokee,” “life,” “how to treat others and respect the world,” “real life,” “reality,” and/or “his heritage, history, culture, social status, and experience.” Most added that he possessed basic academic skills as well; only two students explicitly stated that that he wasn’t “educated” in the school sense.

Implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter 5. As has been noted repeatedly, these written responses were sorely lacking in depth. This phenomenon was similar to my experience in the pilot project, which is why I included the interview component in the current study. Before presenting the analysis of the interview data, I would like to turn to a brief examination of the data that was generated from the class discussions that followed the completion of the journals.

### **Class discussions**

As noted in Chapter 3, analysis of this data proved to be problematic. The interactive nature of the discussion format rendered the identical facilitation of the two experiences unfeasible. Further, the dialectical spirit of the discussions provoked numerous occasions of multiple speakers contributing comments simultaneously, which proved impossible to disentangle during analysis. After posing the same opening

question to both groups (“What was your overall reaction to the book/movie?”) and receiving similar responses (variations of “Boring at first but then okay”), some definite trends emerged as particular themes dominated within each group.

In the movie group I observed a tendency to “personalize” the discussion. The topic of prejudice was again a recurring theme; they discussed its causes and effects, extending the topic to other groups in society, and most significantly applying it to themselves and their peers. This application was not in the context of race, but revolved around the general notion of “putting people down” because they are different. In fact, the group returned to this topic several times within the course of the discussion. Another topic of interest was the differing styles of parenting portrayed in the movie (e.g., the grandparents’ gentle approach versus the sharecropper’s harsh methods), and again these issues were debated within the context of their personal lives, with students relating examples and personal insights and experiences.

Another observed trend was, again, to critique the movie as a movie. Much as I tried to steer the conversation away from the technical attributes of the film, comments continued to crop up regarding such aspects as the music and transitions, at one point developing into a comparison with Disney films. Ironically, when asked if this was a true story, the consensus was that it was “mostly true,” and when asked what they had learned from it, answers indicated that they felt they knew more “about the Depression, Indians, and the Trail of Tears.”

In the book group, on the other hand, the predominant theme was that of questioning the authenticity of the book. Students spent a large portion of the time

detailing parts of the story that they found hard to believe or felt were untrue. The negative undertone was especially pronounced; the discussion threatened to dissolve into a nitpicking session. After guiding the discussion back into the realm of possibility (students conceded the “big events” were “probably true”) and asking if there were ways to find out which parts were true and which were not, the group manifested a classic example of employing Wineburg’s sourcing heuristic, exploring options and spitting out possibilities:

“The Internet!”

“Ask Forrest.”

“Can’t—he’s dead.”

“Maybe someone who talked with him?...”

“The Internet.”

“Yeah, maybe there’s a web page...”

“ Well [I know it could have happened] because I know whiskey was illegal and I know people lived in mountains and I know people got whipped...”

“...and there were orphanages...”

“You could look on a map....”

“Road trip!”

“Field trip!!”

Although this exploration deteriorated into silliness at the end, it is obvious that the students were drawing upon their own (limited) experience in trying to come up with alternate ways to get historical information.

One other striking observation concerns the level of the discussion itself. Rather than comments, questions, or points made by the students being applied by others to their personal lives, most contributions prompted other students to make connections to other parts of the story. It was evident throughout this process that not only had the students read and retained the facts of the story, but that these facts were at their disposal for application to the discussion in various contexts. The extent of their recall was

impressive, and although applications were often facile or lacked historical or experiential insight, it was evident the students understood the substance of the novel.

Finally, when asked directly what they had learned, almost all students replied, “Nothing.” (One student said, “A little.”) However, the content of the discussion disproves this impression. For example, one student commented on Grandpa’s distrust of “the law,” and when I asked the group why they thought this was so, five legitimate propositions reflecting significant historical understanding (including cause and effect) were thrown out in as many seconds:

“The Whiskey Tax!”

“They made the war!”

“The Trail of Tears!”

“They put him in jail for making whiskey!”

“What the soldiers did to the farm in the clearing!”

As noted earlier, it is difficult to compare the class discussions. It is interesting to observe, though, the difference in direction, tone, and content between the two, despite my efforts to focus on the issue of historical accuracy in both cases. The implications of these observations will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Interview data**

Individual interviews constituted the final element of the first phase of the study. As explained previously, the first component of each interview consisted of giving the student an opportunity to explain, clarify, or elaborate upon specific responses from their individual journals. Although analysis of these elaborations revealed almost twice as many “extensions” of original answers for the book group as the movie group, this



statistic in itself may be misleading, in that follow-up questions were asked based upon original content of journal responses. Therefore, the number of extended answers given by students in the interviews in part reflects the discrepancy between the two groups in the number of “reflective” journal entries noted earlier. (Implications of this fact for the study design will be discussed in Chapter 5.)

Of more significance is the nature of the extended answers. While the proportion of interview replies that reflected some degree of historical understanding was the same in both groups (although the book group exhibited a higher level slightly more often, and also expressed erroneous historical insights more often), the percentage of students who simply restated their original answer when responding to the follow-up question was twice as great for the movie group as for the book group (26% versus 13% in the book group). In addition, interviewees in the book group added new components to their answers, displayed emotion or a personal connection to a character or event, evidenced perspective taking, or assimilated facts from the story in their answers more often than members of the movie group. Conversely, respondents in the movie group stated that they were unable to remember why they gave their original response, or reversed their original response, far more often than members of the book group. In general, I got a distinct sense from the interviews that the book group participants had more to draw on in answering the questions than did the movie group participants.

The second part of the interview process consisted of asking all students four identical questions. The first two were questions that had been asked as part of the follow-up questions answered in their journals, and which I felt would provide an

indication of levels of historical understanding. First, each student was asked to characterize “The Way.” Over half of the members of the movie group did not recognize the term (though it was used in the movie) or understand what it meant. Several tried to guess; about half of these approached the central theme of the philosophy. Almost half of the group members offered vague notions of “nature” or being “natural”; one member said that it meant keeping the culture alive. All responses (except for one “guess”) reflected a focus on the physical or natural world.

On the other hand, every response from the book group reflected the spiritual/philosophical heart of “The Way.” Most responses echoed the grandfather’s exhortation to “take only what one needs” and to “take the weakest” so as to “preserve life.” Other responses noted that “everything has a spirit” and that one is to “give back” and try to “be a good person.” All of these elements were portrayed in the movie as well, although understandably not in as much depth, and they were given the same proportionate weight in each medium.

The second question concerned whether the story represented an accurate portrayal of life during the 1930’s. All seven of the movie group members initially indicated that, yes, this was an accurate portrayal; two students qualified that it was accurate for Native Americans because, as one stated: “different people were always treated that way back then.” The other simply believed that it was not accurate for the “rest” of the people. One student acknowledged that we “can’t be totally sure,” and two respondents gave self-contradictory replies.

Within the book group, the immediate reply of six out of the seven participants was negative; they felt that the story left out too much of what was going on in the world (e.g., the Depression, war, cities and towns.) Several students were unsure, two felt it was typical of Native American life, one felt it was not typical of Native American life, and two felt it was stereotypical of politicians and others. Both groups, then, expressed some ambivalence, though book group responses tended to incorporate a bit more critical thinking and attention to fact than those of the movie group.

The third of the four final questions was prompted by an observation (noted earlier) made during the initial coding of the journal responses that only the book group used the term “sharecropper.” The sharecropper character in the story (a little girl) was prominently portrayed in the movie. I wondered if, though not knowing the term, the movie viewers nonetheless garnered some insight into the lifestyle depicted through this character. To this end I asked all participants if they knew what a “sharecropper” was. Predictably, only one member of the movie group knew; all but one of the book group recognized and accurately defined the term. (I got the distinct feeling during the interviews that this lone reader had not read the entire book.) As my focus was whether they had some sense of the lifestyle, I gave a brief definition, and then asked viewers which character they thought might be a sharecropper. Almost all of them identified the little girl as a sharecropper (although one student wondered if it was Little Tree’s Indian grandfather). I then asked them to describe this lifestyle. (In the movie, she indicated that they are waiting on their “share” of the tobacco, that she was proud of how much she could pick, and that she would be moving again soon.) Based on this “clue,” most

respondents in this group ventured that sharecroppers were poor and had a hard life, and most of them had some sense that they “shared the crop” or “worked land for others.” About half incorporated the notion that sharecroppers had to move around a lot; one student concluded that the little girl “was worse off than Little Tree” because she had no shoes or house; another expressed the realization: “so *that* was why she was leaving!” Thus they seem to have absorbed a basic understanding of the life of a sharecropper.

As noted, all but one of the members of the book group recognized the term and portrayed a relatively detailed and accurate description of the lifestyle of a sharecropper. Almost every response included the notion of moving around; one student compared it to the Middle Ages, another to slavery. Levels of historical understanding, perspective taking, and emotion were all much higher than in the movie group, and this is understandable, since the grandfather spends several paragraphs explaining the lifestyle to Little Tree. An interesting note, however: although the book group displayed a more profound understanding during these interviews, not one of them listed the little sharecropper as memorable during the follow-up interviews conducted two months later; almost half of the movie group mentioned her.

Finally, to compare levels of perspective taking, as well as to explore and possibly contrast the substance of spontaneous oral responses versus written ones to an unfamiliar question, I posed one final interview question. I constructed a hypothetical question revolving around the construction of a “Trail of Tears monument/museum,” described basically as a commercial venture, complete with souvenir stands and guided tours. The description was the same for all students, and was intended to portray a decidedly

commercialized enterprise. I then asked students if they could tell me who might be in favor of this venture, who might oppose it, and why. Though almost all students in both groups could “see both sides” when follow-up questions were asked, and acknowledged the possibility of different members of the same group supporting opposite sides of the issue, the initial responses again displayed an interesting trend. Initially, most of the movie group (five of seven) believed that the Native Americans would be opposed, while the same number from the book group believed the Indians would support it. I have no explanation of this result, except perhaps that the movie so vividly presented a series of characters taking advantage of the Native Americans, in addition to the fact that the story of the “Trail of Tears” itself was related very solemnly and dramatically in the movie. (As in the case of the sharecropper, two of the students in the movie group mentioned the Trail of Tears as one of the most memorable aspects of the movie; no one from the book group mentioned this episode.) This may have predisposed the movie viewers to be suspicious of any endeavor initiated by “outside” groups. In any case, as the interviews progressed and I asked follow-up questions, about equal numbers in each group identified the various possible groups of opponents and proponents: those who stood to profit, politicians, people who are prejudiced, Native Americans, and supporters/detractors of Native Americans. All had logical, if unequally plausible, explanations for their choices.

### **Final interviews**

The final phase of data collection involved a follow-up interview with each student approximately ten weeks after the initial interviews. This interview likewise

consisted of four questions. The first question concerned what they remembered most from the book/movie. I asked each student to list the top three things (s)he remembered from *The Education of Little Tree*.

The total number of different elements named was similar in both groups (nine for the movie group, eleven for the book group), although topics addressed were more concentrated in the movie group: three quarters of the total number of responses were registered for four responses, while the top four responses in the movie group acquired about half of the answers. The segment of the story mentioned most often by all students was the school/orphanage; every member of the movie group cited this aspect, while it was referred to by about one half of the book group. Almost each of half group (three in each) also remembered the deaths that had occurred. Interestingly, some incidents were mentioned exclusively by one group or the other; all of these instances occurred in both versions of the story. Incidents cited by the movie group tended to be emotional, exciting, and/or visual: the beating of the little girl, the dogs, the law chasing them, and the dramatic recounting of the Trail of Tears by the mystical Indian. (In the novel, Little Tree's grandparents tell him the story, in significantly more detail.) The components of the story that received exclusive attention from members of the book group were elements of "The Way" and a humorous scene in which Little Tree and his grandparents outsmart two dishonest "businessmen." And while the theme of prejudice had been addressed more predominantly by members of the movie group in the journal responses (p. 8), the only reference to this issue was made by a student in the book group.

The second question regarded the students' opinion of Little Tree's "education," and their evaluation of how well that education would serve him in life. Both groups mentioned his "limited" academic training but emphasized his "other," more experiential education. Both groups tended to feel that this education would not serve him well in the "real world," although about half the members of both groups believed that his Indian education might be beneficial even if he decided to live in the "white" world. The main difference that emerged was that the book group exhibited a higher level of ambivalence; most of these students had a difficult time giving a straight "yes" or "no" answer to the question.

The third question was intended to get a sense of attitudes toward Native Americans. Not having posed the question before the study, I was aware that any resultant insights would be unavoidably incomplete. But having lived and taught on an Indian reservation, an interest in this idea was sparked as I observed students' perceptions throughout the course of the study. So I included the question: What would be your thinking if you learned that a new student coming to your school was a Native American? The reactions were somewhat unsurprising but interesting nonetheless. Almost half of the students in both groups felt that this new student would be a "normal kid," a "regular kid" who would "just look different and that's it" and "think just like us." The slight majority in both classes were cognizant of possible cultural differences; several students (one from the movie group and two from the book group) expressed interest in learning from this new student, and every student in the study indicated that "it wouldn't be a big deal" or some similar sentiment. (I found these results interesting because, in a way, they

reflect the ambivalence I heard expressed from high school students on the reservation concerning this very question. The same students who would maintain, “We’re just like normal kids” would later assert, “Hey, we’re not little white boys.”) While it is clearly impossible to determine if the opinions expressed are due in any measure to the story, the fact that most students indicated that they knew little about Native Americans before the study led me to include their responses here.

I ended the final interviews by asking students whether they preferred answering questions orally or in writing. Predictably, the overwhelming majority of students preferred responding orally. Perhaps coincidentally, the only two who preferred writing their replies were in the book group. One student who preferred writing felt it was more personal and easier to put down what she thought; the other agreed that it was easier to express feelings on paper. Even some of those who preferred oral responses noted that it was hard to think and respond during the interview, and one student noted that “you probably get more detail in writing” (which was counterintuitive for me.) This same student felt, however, that the interview process helps you think faster and “just come up with truer answers.” In the same vein, one student stated that he preferred responding orally because “I think faster than I can write,” and said that actually he would prefer typing his answers (which he couldn’t do in his journal because he was in the movie group). Many acknowledged that it would have been easier to have had the questions ahead of time and had time to formulate answers; this, of course, opens up the possibility that answers may become less individual and more “community” answers. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which students’ preferences were induced by the fact that



“talking is easier” and “I don’t like to write,” as many of them expressly stated. What is borne out is my original premise (and reason for including the interviews) that different learners feel comfortable with different modes of communication. We will return to this matter in Chapter 5.

So a number of trends regarding the manner in which students process information and construct meaning across different modes of presentation appear to emerge through the analysis of these data. Any attempt to draw conclusions or propose implications must, however, take into account the moderating influence of the study design. The implications of these findings will be focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Interpretation

#### **Findings**

The primary focus of this study concerns whether the development of historical understanding for students is mediated by the medium through which the subject matter is presented. Examination of the initial data relating to the substance of the students' answers to the prompt suggests that this may indeed be the case. Remember that the students in the movie group were twice as likely to report that what the character in the story had learned could be classified as "practical" or "social" as were those in the book group, while the book group described his learning as "historical" 50% more often. This trend was observed again during the exit interviews, during which students' responses reflected considerable diversity regarding the meanings they had retained from the book or movie. Likewise during the class discussions, only the book group evidenced the use of the sourcing heuristic or the application of concepts under discussion to events in the book over application to their personal lives.

How does one account for these differences? This question gives rise to the next: Do the means employed in processing a story differ significantly across the two media forms? Or, put another way, do students engage in different processes in the construction of meaning based upon the medium employed in the presentation of the material? If so, what dynamics might explain these differences?

Although the findings from group discussions generally replicate those of the prison study, I believe the data overall suggest a modification of Rubin's conclusion that

“film evokes a more emotional but shorter-lived effect than reading.” Indeed, students viewing the film did display a greater emotional response during the viewing process, as evidenced by their demeanor and reactions; naturally, observation of students reading the novel yielded no such response, as the students customarily read quietly. However, during the students’ immediate reflection on the medium as recorded in their journals, more emotional responses were documented for the book group than for the movie group. This would seem to indicate a level of emotion which is more cerebral than the physiological emotional responses documented in the Payne Fund studies by Ruckmick and Dysinger, and also supports Davis’ and Stuarts’ contention concerning the predominant cognitive component of historical empathy. Further, though the viewers did seem to take note of and remember the more emotional and highly-charged aspects of the movie, this response was not short-lived, as evidenced by the follow-up interviews, a finding which appears to again support the conclusions of the Payne studies and others. The historical understandings constructed by members of the movie group and related over two months later were clear, vivid, and in most cases, correct (e.g., their almost unanimous initial reaction that Native Americans would probably oppose the Trail of Tears tourist attraction, which some members of the book group did not “get.”)

Nor do the data pertaining to the nature of the students’ reactions to the book or movie as recorded in their journals fit neatly into this “emotional” versus “cognitive” dichotomy. It will be recalled that throughout their journal responses, the viewers engaged in prediction, generalization, interpretation, and criticism more often than did the readers. The readers, for their part, expressed emotion, reflected personal identification,

employed self-dialogue, or showed evidence of perspective taking to a greater extent than the viewers. Initially these findings both surprised and puzzled me, for at first glance, the reactions of the movie group appear to be more cognitive and objective, while the readers' responses reflect more emotion, personal connection, and internalization.

### **Possible explanations**

Conceivably, then, the results more accurately corroborate Loevinger's proposition (see Chapter 2, p. 23) concerning the cognitive levels implicit in each medium: he noted that the visual media convey "the most information in the most literal form...requiring the least effort to interpret abstractions." Conversely, written sources represent the highest level of linguistic abstraction, and therefore require the highest levels of intellectual effort to interpret.

It may be, then, that the differences in the nature of the responses between the two groups are related to the observation that the viewers also tended to simply retell the story far more often than the readers did, and perhaps both phenomena are related to a singular underlying source. Perhaps, as Loevinger maintains, the act of reading involves processing the story at a more "internal" or "intimate" level than viewing. With a book, the initial means of encounter, being linguistic, is abstract; the "picture" (and the meaning) must be constructed by the individual from the words. In the case of a film, the process proceeds in the opposite direction: the "picture" (and maybe the meaning) is presented to the viewer, who then must express his/her reaction in words. This reaction

for members of the movie group was often to simply put what they had just seen into words.

Such an explanation is consistent with Rosenblatt's transactional theory, as well as with Bagley & Hunter's (1992) findings that "these variations among media...suggest that children will engage and use different strategies in interpreting information from them" (in Flood, Heath, & Lapp, p. 17). This interpretation also reinforces Riley's claim that the visual media discourage in-depth analysis and perspective taking, and, in fact, through their "present-mindedness...cultivate a certain contempt for precise meaning and critical reasoning" (p. 140), and supports Singer & Singer's (1983) argument that

the emphasis on visual images...is thought to favor a holistic interpretation of events, rather than a careful and deeper analysis... Reading, on the other hand, is slower-paced—by its very deliberation, it seems too provide an opportunity for greater integration of the material with patterns of memory, wishes, and intentions" (in Flood, Heath, & Lapp, p. 17).

These findings suggesting that the book group evidenced higher levels of abstraction in their responses (more philosophical and historical considerations versus personal, practical, or social reflections of the movie group), engaged in simple re-telling far less often than the movie group, and exhibited greater depth in both journal and oral responses are consistent with similar findings from the pilot study (see Chapter 2, pp. 28, 29), in which all spiritual or moral insights related were attributed to the reading of the novel, and in which the students emphasized the higher level of involvement that they experienced with the novel as opposed to the movie. The fact that, while answering the follow-up questions during the interviews, the students in the book group revealed more depth and integrated various aspects of the story in their responses corroborates

Meringhoff's (1980) conclusion (cited on p. 26) that "the more subtle skills of drawing on one's prior knowledge were more evident among children who had a book read to them than those who had viewed an animated version of the story," and indicates a qualitative, not just quantitative, difference in the nature of the understandings achieved from the students' encounters with the story.

Baines (1993) explored whether the actual linguistic content may not be at the root of the difference in students' modes of processing the story: He found "a dramatic difference in how language is employed in novels and in film," and concluded:

Obviously, in its current manifestation, film does not come close to the richness of the linguistic environment available through books... However, film's strong points are not words, but accessibility, immediacy, and the ability to communicate visually and aurally at the same time (in Flood, Heath, & Lapp, p. 552).

According to Baines, this notion of film's immediacy has been noted by other researchers in the field. Along with the Payne studies, he cites Langdorf's (1991) description of film's "capacity to provide a pictorial representation of lived experience," asserting that "the moving image will almost always be more convincing than words" (p. 547). He further references Cantor (1991) when he contends that "film has the capacity to foster intense emotional responses" (p. 546), and quotes the poet Richard Wilbur (1970): "Even the worst movie has much of the authority of the actual, and quite without knowing it one comes out of the theatre brainwashed into scanning the world through the norms of the camera" (p. 547).

This notion that film's accessibility and immediacy fosters more holistic and emotional responses may help explicate another trend that emerged during analysis. For

example, it was noted that, although the account of the Trail of Tears was nearly identical in both media, only the book group members “corrected” the historical “fact” that it was the bystanders, not the Cherokee, who cried, and, further, that this group gave a slightly more detailed and “authentic” depiction of the event. Yet only members of the movie group registered this episode as one of the most memorable parts of the story. Likewise, whereas the book group evinced a much deeper and more specific understanding of “The Way,” most members of the movie group appeared to have a general understanding of Native American beliefs and lifestyle. Most significant, perhaps, were the responses relating to the sharecroppers. Again, while students in the book group displayed a much more extensive understanding of the lifestyle of and problems facing this group, only students in the movie group mentioned this character in their final interviews. And finally, the attention paid by the movie group to the issue of prejudice may also be an indication of the penchant for film to present a vivid or emotional depiction of an issue or subject.

It would appear, then, that the choice of medium does have innate implications for the way in which historical understanding is constructed, both in terms of the processes through which it is constructed, as well as for the understandings that are so constructed. These data suggest that reading encourages a deeper, more analytical, and more individualized approach on the part of the student in the attempt to interpret a given narrative; they further suggest that such interpretations would tend to be more complete, more complex, and more rigorous, although they may also be erroneous more often. Any

conclusive discussion of these implications, however, must be placed within the context of the limitations of this study, and suggestions for further research.

### **Limitations**

During the course of the project, numerous unanticipated developments and observations occurred which profoundly impact any conclusions to be drawn from this study. I would first like to discuss these qualifying circumstances, and then to turn to a consideration of their implications.

The first issue, which manifested itself almost immediately, was the choice of the novel/movie itself. Although the book was highly recommended and appeared on the summer reading lists of multiple schools (typically at the high 6<sup>th</sup> grade level), the participants in the study were gifted seventh graders, and the choice was discussed months before the study began and at length with the teacher, *The Education of Little Tree* proved to be a less than ideal choice for this group of students. The fact that it was a first-person account related through the eyes of a child contributed to its power and its poignancy, but, in hindsight, assumed a level of understanding, both historical and experiential, that was beyond these students. Many students complained of having trouble with the dialogue (which reflected the speech patterns of “mountain people” during the 1930’s); students from both groups felt this was a hindrance to their understanding, although it appears to have disaffected the readers more than the viewers. (This can probably be explained by the fact that the movie contained the visual elements to compensate for the lack of understanding.) I believe this issue impacted not only



levels of understanding, but also contributed to a growing negativity I began to perceive and which persisted (if not increased) throughout the study.

I do not believe, however, that this negativity can be attributed exclusively to this particular book. The same phenomenon occurred during the pilot project with the high school students: responses for the book group became increasingly negative as the study progressed. At that time, too, I initially felt that it was due to a poor book choice; however, in the students' final responses (after all students had experienced both versions of the story), the students overwhelmingly chose the book over the movie when asked which was more meaningful to them—and *which one they like better!* Thus it would appear that other factors contribute to this response. I speculated after the initial study that perhaps it was due to the nature of the school setting and the constraints and pressures that lie therein: social, academic, and time. Again, this was the reasoning behind moving the study to a lower grade level, in the hopes of eliminating some of the “educational baggage” to which I had attributed the original phenomenon. Its reemergence in the present study obliges me to reconsider its implications for future research.

Another unexpected snag was the aforementioned language arts project which was simultaneously assigned to the book group during the study. Without a doubt this situation negatively impacted their ability to encounter the book in the *aesthetic stance*, a common dilemma in social studies classrooms, as noted by Galda and Liang ( 2003). Although the school setting again makes this difficult to begin with, the study was designed with the express purpose of encouraging this precondition. When the teacher

informed me of this development (as the study was getting underway), I considered that this state of affairs, while not ideal, might help mitigate the development of any negative attitudes in the book group. (Another observation generated from the pilot study was the sense among students “selected” to read the book that they had to do more “work” and didn’t “get to” watch the movie.) I thought that perhaps knowing that they were “getting class time” to read the book that they would be using for their project, while the movie group did not, might alleviate some of the feelings of disappointment. Obviously, as noted above, this was not the case.

Another difficulty encountered was the deficiency evident in the written responses. Initially I blamed the prompt, which I felt had encouraged the students to limit their reflections to a narrow scope. However, this tendency toward incomplete and disappointing responses again reflected a similar trend observed in the pilot, which at that time I attributed to a lack of specificity and focus in terms of directing their responses. I felt that the guidelines for the journals had been too broad, and consequently students didn’t know *what* to write. This deduction, in addition to the fact that I wanted to target specifically the processes involved in the construction of meaning in this study, led me to introduce an organizing idea from which students could begin their reflections. Thus, although the prompt is unquestionably partially culpable in this result, I think there are other factors at work as well. After being continually urged to go beyond the prompt in their responses, some students abandoned the prompt altogether and simply wrote their personal reactions to each chapter. The quality of these responses was not significantly

higher than those based on the prompt. Again, this observation bears further consideration concerning implications for future studies.

One final concern to be addressed is that of the interview responses. In general, as has been noted, interview responses lacked the insight and description that I had anticipated. Part of the responsibility for this no doubt lies with the interviewer. (This became particularly clear to while listening to them during the analysis.) Yet, allowing for any specific modifications which might be deemed appropriate, I nonetheless felt that students were not as forthcoming as I had expected. I do not feel that this reflected a lack of rapport with them, although it might be partly attributable to the nature of the student-teacher relationship in general. Students, when interviewed alone, exhibited a certain level of shyness and lack of certainty not evident at all during the class discussion. Perhaps due to the notion of safety in numbers, and also to the fact that they could draw from other students' responses, they exhibited a much greater degree of freedom of expression during the group discussions. Another part of the explanation may lie, again, in the nature of the school setting. These interviews were conducted during the students' study hall period, which I had presumed to be a relatively "stress-free" time for the students. Although the students themselves set the schedule, and were always asked before beginning an interview if it was a good time to conduct it, I sensed that most of them had "things to do" and as a result gave rather cursory answers. Some were clearly not as comfortable as others answering questions face-to-face, while others gave the impression that they were telling me all they had to say. There are countless variables

that constitute a successful interview; I mention the limitations evident in the current study for the purpose of addressing their significance for future endeavors.

Finally, with regard to the usefulness of the group discussions as a means of generating data, there are obvious benefits and drawbacks. As noted earlier, students were more open and eager with responses in this setting, although there is the concomitant problem of ascertaining individual responses, as well as the tendency for one or two students to set the tone for the discussion. Further, the comparative value of the data is limited. Still, the techniques did prove helpful for providing an overall sense of the group's reaction to the story, and it provided a good opportunity for me to offer clarifications and to address misconceptions in the students' perception. Thus, while I initially considered eliminating this aspect of the study, I believe it may have some advantages for group studies, provided one is cognizant of the inherent pitfalls.

### **Implications for future research**

The implications of the various aspects of the study discussed in the previous section can be divided into two categories: implications for future research and pedagogical implications. The implications for future research can likewise be divided into two aspects, depending on the intended direction of said research. During the course of my analysis, it became apparent to me that I was somewhat ambiguous concerning the objective behind the analysis. While my stated purpose was to attempt to discern differences between the processes involved in the development of historical thinking across the two media, I found myself, unavoidably perhaps, evaluating the actual content

of that understanding. The two are inextricably linked, of course; there is little point in examining processes that produce flawed understandings. Still, it occurred to me that it would behoove one to differentiate the two aspects, process or product, for the purpose of obtaining more useful data through future endeavors.

If the purpose of future research were to evaluate or compare the level or nature of historical understanding across the two media (i.e., the product), recommendations suggested by this research would principally involve attempting to address mitigating factors. In other words, if one were interested in assessing the end results—i.e., level and/or nature of historical understanding with regard to each medium—it may be advisable to adopt the present study design, with modifications suggested by the results. For example, perhaps group discussions should be more structured to increase the comparative value of the data, and maybe followed by individual written responses to particular issues raised during the course of the discussion. Another recommendation based on the findings might be to try to establish measures to maximize the quality—or at least length—of the journal entries and/or interview responses: perhaps mandating a length, addressing specific historical (or social or economic) topics or issues, arranging for the classroom teacher to conduct the study, incorporating it within the existing curriculum, or whatever methods the researcher may deem helpful to increase the quality of authentic reflections /responses by students within the school setting. For the outcome of historical understanding realistically achieved within this setting is, after all, the whole point of such a study.

Further, while attempting to select a book and movie on the appropriate level and of sufficient interest for the students, I would not be overly concerned with “matching” the content of the two; again, the goal is the product, the insights or understandings derived from each medium, stemming from whatever each has to offer. (Clearly a movie is what it is and a book is what it is and a classroom teacher makes an instructional choice based on these existing realities.) The key is consistency with regard to stance for each medium; it is important not to approach each medium from differing perspectives.

As for attempting to thwart the development of potential negativity from creeping in, perhaps some of the above-mentioned measures may address this concern as well. Locating the research within normal classroom operations may help to alleviate the root causes. It may be beneficial if the classes involved could be similar in composition but unaware of the other “option.” As I am not sure as to the actual source of the observed negativism, it would be interesting to observe whether it crops up under other conditions.

If, on the other hand, the objective were to better understand the process of constructing historical meaning, the strongest recommendation would be to remove the study from the school setting. Paradoxically, I believe the findings would have greater relevance to the classroom if the research were relocated outside of that environment. The goal is to understand the process—or, as I explained to the students, to give the researcher a peek inside their heads as they processed what they watched or read. But in reality, a teacher is not going to pause a movie after each scene—nor would that be desirable. So the present study utilized an artificial construct in imposing this condition. (I was aware of this at the outset and it was explained to the participants; I did not

anticipate the impact this fact would have on the results.) A more productive avenue would be to work one-on-one with a student, or for the student to use a tape-recorder as (s)he reads or views in an environment removed from the constraints of the school setting described above.

In addition, in a study of this nature, the actual content of each medium *is* important and should be as identical as possible. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to use a single chapter or selection from the book and a corresponding scene from the movie, in order that the focus of the data generation might be focused on process over content. Targeted historical understandings should be specifically identified and the process more closely monitored, perhaps with tape or video recording or personal conversation, similar in nature to Weinburg's "think-alouds."

Modifying the study in this way would almost certainly help foster the adoption of the aesthetic stance by students. It was observed in both studies (and noted by Galda and Lang, see p. 46) that the traditional classroom environment works against attempts by teachers to encourage this perspective in their students. In the present study, certainly the concurrent project assigned by the classroom teacher interfered with the adoption of this viewpoint. But an inability to relinquish ingrained academic habits was likewise observed in the pilot study. Moreover, in the present study, the responses from the movie group asking "What were we supposed to learn?" further documents the dominance of the efferent stance in the classroom. Students' "purpose" in reading/viewing, then, should be directed toward an awareness of their personal interaction with the given medium, rather than the attainment of specific content.

### **Pedagogical implications**

To some, the pedagogical implications of this study may appear obvious, but they bear discussion. For me, the most significant observation to emerge from my participation in this project concerns the role of the teacher in fostering the development of historical thinking. The teacher's (or researcher's) influence permeated the activities and results in every phase of this teaching unit. Though it is obvious that a teacher's philosophy and attitudes will determine the nature of the inquiry and the selection of educational materials, the teacher's impact on the process extends far beyond these initial stages. The findings from every aspect of this study—from book selection to methodology to evaluation—underscore the critical import of understanding Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development*, and the essential need for a teacher to understand where his/her students are “coming from,” as well as to establish a learning environment which maximizes their potential for authentic development.

First of all, it is critical that the teacher possess an accurate understanding of the level(s) of historical understanding at which her/his students are operating. This understanding is important because, according to Vygotsky, when students are truly operating within their zone, the intellectual development which occurs triggers a desire for new learning, which in turn motivates them to pursue further development: “This change in the structure of the child's behavior is related to basic alterations in the child's needs and motivations...New motives, socially rooted and intense, provide the child with direction” (p. 37). Vygotsky uses Lewin's term “quasi-needs” to describe these new motives, which lead to a reorganization of the child's whole voluntary and affective



system. Such a scenario would certainly be instrumental in offsetting—even perhaps eliminating—potential negativism within the classroom.

It is also crucial that the teacher establish the notion of stance; this is particularly important for students viewing the film. Further, the responsibility in creating and maintaining an appropriate viewing environment is crucial in order for students to experience an authentic encounter with the medium. This point was made clear to me as I observed the students viewing the film. Left to their own devices, most students would prefer to passively watch the movie; peer pressure and social custom encourage the sharing of views and comments, and often there is a tendency to “follow the leader” in terms of reactions to the movie. All of these behaviors discourage the act of constructing personal meaning from the film, and it is the difficult task of the teacher to maintain an atmosphere which dissuades these behaviors. Thus, a teacher cannot simply “put in a movie,” even if (s)he has set up the appropriate expectations and perspective, and expect the process of meaning-making to proceed without further guidance.

The role of the teacher is likewise significant for readers. Beyond utilizing a genuine understanding of his/her students in the selection of the book/movie, and developing the notion of stance with them, it is incumbent upon the teacher to moderate and monitor the student’s relationship to the text (or film). The degree to which this is necessary is a factor of both the objectives of the exercise and the age and ability of the students. Eeds and Peterson (1991) remind us of the role of teachers “to help their students develop literary insights and aesthetic judgment” (p. 119), noting that Squire (1989) observed that these insights will not “develop automatically without guidance and

nourishment from the teacher” (p.10). This concern accounted for the majority of my entries in my reflexive journal, and I believe the development of this insight to be among the most significant implications of this study. All of the findings presented were mediated by the manner of implementation by the researcher/teacher.

A second observation struck me on a more personal level. I found myself feeling disheartened at times by some students’ negative or flippant reactions to the book or movie, for which I would subsequently rebuke myself for my lack of objectivity. Upon reflection, I realized that this may just be “the nature of the beast,” a condition that comes with the territory of teaching. Most teachers—the good ones, anyway—enter the profession driven by a passion to open the minds (and, perhaps, hearts) of their students, and a vision to try to make the world a better place through their efforts. In a review of Garrison’s book *Dewey and Eros* (1997), Dorney (1998) reminds us of “Dewey’s claim that teaching is not simply a cognitive endeavor” (574), and remarks that “our capacity to work for growth among our students, which should be the highest aim of education according to Dewey and Garrison, is dependent on our ability to love or bestow value on them” (p. 573). Therefore teachers continually walk a fine line between fervor and detachment, between attempting to inspire their charges and maintaining an open mind. It is a delicate balance indeed, and one which every teacher must individually achieve. Dorney asks: “Where and how in schools of education and in district development programs do we honor the spirits and souls of teachers?...Simply put, the spirits, hearts minds, and bodies of students cannot be tended by people whose own spirits, hearts, minds, and bodies are burnt out and exhausted” (p. 574). It may be constructive for

teacher education curricula (particularly in the social studies) to address this issue directly, and likewise beneficial for practicing teachers to reflect on their position vis-à-vis this question.

Finally, these findings corroborate much of the research illuminating the benefits and drawbacks for the use of each medium in education. Teachers must be clear in their objectives in order to choose the appropriate medium for their purpose. Therefore the question is not which medium is better for the development of historical thinking, but which could be employed most usefully for a particular objective. Some historical understanding may in fact have a considerable affective or emotional component, and a visual representation may aid in developing that understanding. Neuman concurs that “in some cases...visually presented moving images may instill insight and understanding far better than verbal descriptions” (p. 18).

### **Toward a theory of “complementarity”**

Unquestionably, movies have the potential to greatly impact learning in the social studies classroom. When I taught American history, I’m not sure I could have come up with a better way to convey the overall sense of the sense of defeat and bereavement of the Native Americans than the heart-stopping scene in *Little Bigman* when Sunshine and her baby are gunned down by the government soldiers; or the futility and folly of war encapsulated in Archie’s charge out into “no man’s land” between the trenches in *Gallipoli*, where he is similarly annihilated by enemy fire. In both cases, sound is temporarily suspended in the movie, and in both cases, you could hear a pin drop in the

classroom. Clearly these were “lived through” experiences for these students, and they certainly acquired a significant level of historical understanding through this medium.

However, not all empathic understandings are necessarily emotional. And I believe this research, as well as the literature on historical thinking, clearly indicates that deep, highly personal, and, at times, even more affective perspective taking may be achieved through literature. Neuman (1997) suggests an approach which embraces “the complementarity of media,” as “there are distinctive features of media that may influence the way children interpret stories” (p. 17). She observes:

In the process of interacting with media, children use a wide range of physical, perceptual, and cognitive skills. As they engage in each activity, they acquire not only domain-specific information, but strategic knowledge regarding the medium’s strengths and limitations (p. 18).

Rosenstone (2004) insists: “We must, in short, stop expecting films to do what (we imagine) books to do” (p. 30), and that we must abandon the “notion that somehow the medium is neutral, that a topic can be translated from page to screen without undergoing significant alterations” (p. 33). Bluestone concluded in 1957: “the film and the novel remain separate institutions, each achieving its best results by exploring unique and specific properties” (p. 218) and Baines (1997) agrees: “Film cannot do what books can; books cannot do what film can” (p. 552); as such, the two media are not interchangeable.

## **Conclusion**

It appears, then, that as the media themselves are characterized by qualitative differences, so also are the means through which they are processed by individuals. The results of this study suggest that a student’s encounter with the printed word appears to

require greater involvement on multiple levels in the pursuit to construct meaning from the text, and that this involvement may have significant impact upon the meanings so constructed. Preliminarily it appears that print sources may be more advantageous in providing students with an opportunity to develop Yeager and Wilson's "habits of mind and disciplined-based perspectives" and the skills of thoughtful critical analysis and empathic reflection. Further, such sources may better answer Blackey's call "to evaluate sources, to analyze various kinds of data, and to synthesize ideas."

I stated in Chapter 1 that historical thinking requires active, not passive, learning. What is of singular concern for me is the standard practice among teachers of "substituting" the movie version of a literary work, due usually to time constraints, supposing that the trade-off is simply a "watered-down" adaptation of the story. Clearly, as this research suggests and other researchers have claimed, this is not the case; hence, the two media should not be seen as alternative means for achieving the same result. Films should not be seen as a shortcut to the development of historical understanding and empathy. Indeed, there are no shortcuts to the development of deep, rich understandings. In reviewing Tanner's book *Dewey's Relevance to Schools of Today*, Thornton says,

Tanner reminds us why Dewey was, and remains, controversial. He resisted the quick fixes to educational problems in which so many Americans, including education professionals, have place, and continue to place, their faith...he was not afraid to get his hands dirty in educational experimentation that would demonstrate tested alternatives to the educational panaceas of the day. In this respect, Tanner is surely correct, there is a lesson still to be learned (pp. 295-6).

In conclusion, it is my sincere hope that this paper may contribute in some way to our understanding of the nature of historical thinking, and the relative roles played by the various media in the process of developing such thinking in our students. Obviously,

further research is needed along the lines indicated in order to continue to build a model of social studies instruction that provides students with the authentic opportunity to truly “think historically.”

I believe that the findings of this study will have practical implications for professional educators. I trust the possible applications of the findings to school curricula and teaching practice have already been implied. Of course, it is up to the individual teacher to decide what, if any, meaning these findings will have for his/her classroom practice. Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that the relevance of a study depends upon its applicability, or *transferability*, to other contexts or respondents. Cited in Erlandson et.al. (1993), they specify that “in a naturalistic study, the obligation for demonstrating transferability belongs to those who would apply it to the receiving context” (p. 33). I would like to think that Susan Ohanian (1994) speaks for many teachers when she states: “We teachers need *less* practicality not more. We need to have our lives informed by Tolstoy, Jane Adams, Suzanne Langer, and their ilk—not by folks who promise the keys to classroom control and creative bulletin boards, along with one hundred steps to reading success” (cited in Anderson & Herr, 1999, p. 20, italics in original). Perhaps these findings may assist teachers who are seeking to develop learning environments that are so informed.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **PRE-STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Do you like to read? How much do you read? How many books have you read (outside of school) in the last month?
2. What is your preferred way to learn? (Please rank 1 through 4, 1 being your favorite.)

\_\_\_\_\_ reading

\_\_\_\_\_ lecture

\_\_\_\_\_ hands-on activity

\_\_\_\_\_ movie/video

### **PRE-POST QUESTIONS**

1. What was the “Trail of Tears?” Why was it called this? What impact did it have on later generations of Cherokee?
2. What is/was the “Indian way?” What do you think about this philosophy?
3. What is the nature of prejudice? Why do you think some people are prejudiced against certain other people?

### **POST READING/VIEWING QUESTIONS**

1. Who wrote this book/movie? Is this a true story?
2. When and where does this story take place?
3. What was life like for Little Tree? Would you have wanted to be in his place? Would you have wanted him for a friend?
4. How typical was Little Tree’s experience of other Native American boys at this time? Do you think this story is an accurate portrayal of Indian life during the 1930’s?
5. Was Little Tree “educated?” Explain.

## APPENDIX B

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your overall reaction to the book/film?
2. Why do you think it was called *The “Education” of Little Tree*?
3. What did you learn from the book/movie?
4. What was the lasting impact of the Trail of Tears on the Cherokee culture?

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Preliminary Interview

- A. Follow-up questions based on journal responses
- B. Standard questions
  1. What impact did the Trail of Tears have on individual Cherokee in later generations?
  2. What is the “Indian Way?” What do you think of this philosophy?
  3. Do you think this story is an accurate portrayal of life during the 1930’s?
  4. What is the role of government with regard to Native Americans, both historically and currently?
  5. What are “sharecroppers?” Describe their lifestyle.
  6. Comment on this hypothetical situation: There is a group of people trying to establish a commercial “memorial” at a site along the “Trail of Tears.” This project would include a monument and plaque, a souvenir shop, place to take pictures, etc. Some people are strongly opposed to this venture. Who do you think would be in each group, and why?

#### Follow-Up Interviews

1. What are the three things you remember most about *The Education of Little Tree*?
2. What do you think about Little Tree’s education? Will it serve him well in his life?
3. Suppose you found out that a new student coming to your school is Native American. What preconceived ideas would you have concerning this person?
4. Would you have preferred to answer these questions in writing, or do you like answering them orally?



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